

Bahraini paper calls for reconciliation with Qatar

MANAMA (AFP) — A Bahraini newspaper close to the government on Sunday called for an end to the bitter war of words with neighbouring Qatar over a territorial dispute between the two Gulf states. "The conflict should be solved wisely, away from one-upmanship and arguments," said the Akhbar Al Khaleej daily. The paper said the two countries should not allow "enemies to undermine their relations and question the links between their peoples." The call for calm comes after months of threats and recriminations between the two countries over Qatar's claim to the disputed Hawar Islands in the Gulf. Bahrain boycotted the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit between Dec. 7 and 9 in Qatar over the decades-old dispute, and tension between the two countries was raised another notch when Bahrain announced on the eve of the GCC meeting that it had arrested two alleged Qatari spies.

Jordan Times

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U.S. increases pressure on Israelis, Palestinians

Ross urges Arafat to sign Hebron deal and Netanyahu to drop settlement plans

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — The United States stepped up the pressure on Israelis and Palestinians alike Sunday with a new round of mediation by Mideast troubleshooter Dennis Ross aimed at reviving the stalled peace process.

Tensions caused by the stalemate were highlighted when a bomb exploded early Sunday outside a West Bank settlement and three firebombs were thrown at an army position and Jewish settlers' homes in Hebron. No injuries were caused by the attacks, the army said.

Mr. Ross arrived late Saturday for a 48-hour mission as the envoy of President Bill Clinton and immediately got to work transmitting strongly worded mes-

sages from the U.S. leader to both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, officials from both sides said.

Officials were publicly tight-lipped about the contents of Mr. Ross' talks.

But Israeli press reports quoted Netanyahu aides as saying Mr. Clinton's message strongly urged Mr. Arafat to accept a compromise deal on Israel's long-overdue troop withdrawal from the West Bank city of Hebron.

At the same time, Mr. Clinton pressed Mr. Netanyahu to back off his explosive decision to expand Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas.

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Arafat updates King

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein on Sunday received a telephone call from Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during which they discussed the latest developments in the peace process. They also discussed the contacts between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the Palestinians and the United States.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, said King Hussein and Mr. Arafat stressed the need for Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to pursue contacts and to exert all possible efforts to end the deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli track and to ensure the implementation of all accords signed by the two sides including the agreement on Israeli redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron.

In the Gaza Strip, Mr. Arafat meanwhile received Minister of Youth Mohammad Daoudiyeh and a delegation accompanying him on a visit to the Palestinian territories.

During the meeting, Mr. Arafat expressed his keen interest in strengthening relations between the Palestinian National Authority and Jordan, particularly in sports and youth affairs.

Princess Rahma is engaged to Alaa Batayneh

By Jennifer Hamarneh
 Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Royal Court yesterday announced the engagement of Her Royal Highness Princess Rahma Bint Al Hassan to Alaa Aref Batayneh.

His Majesty King Hussein attended the engagement ceremony, held at the residence of Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hassan and Princess Sarvath.

Also present for the ceremony were His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad, several members of the royal family, Minister of Health Aref Batayneh and Mrs. Batayneh, parents of the groom-to-be, members of the Batayneh family and close friends of both families.

Princess Rahma is the eldest daughter of Crown Prince Hassan and Princess Sarvath.

Born in Amman on Aug. 13, 1969, Princess Rahma completed her primary education in Jordan and her secondary education at Britain's Sherborne School for Girls.

She is a graduate of Trinity College and holds a bachelor's degree with hon-

ours in Oriental studies and a masters degree in international relations.

The Princess has worked with the U.N. Commission of Experts which was formed to investigate human rights violations in former Yugoslavia, and currently works at the office of the Crown Prince. She has represented Prince Hassan at several forums both in Jordan and abroad.

Princess Rahma is president of the Princess Rahma Society for Heritage Revival/Ma'an as well as the Jordan Youth Building the Future Club and the Jordan Gymnastics Association.

The Princess is fluent in Arabic and English, speaks Spanish and French and has a reading knowledge of Turkish.

Alaa Batayneh was born on June 6, 1969 and graduated from the De La Salle School in Amman.

He obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a masters degree in management information systems, both from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Following his graduation, he worked in London for



two years for Recal Avionics. Mr. Batayneh now works with the private sector in Jordan.

King Hussein congratulated the young couple wishing them a happy and

prosperous life. Prince Hassan and Princess Sarvath said they were delighted to share the happy news with fellow Jordanians and thanked them for their good wishes.

State plans company to market produce and acquire advanced agro-technology

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti on Sunday announced plans to create a company for marketing agricultural products and to help transfer modern agriculture-related technology to Jordan.

Such a company could be helping the farmers to utilize water with greater efficiency and ensure larger outputs, Mr. Kabariti said at a meeting in his office with representatives of Jordan Valley farmers.

After listening to the views and demands of the farmers as well as their complaints, Mr. Kabariti said the government was concerned

over these issues and determined to take possible measures in cooperation with farmers to find appropriate solutions.

The prime minister said there was need for Jordan to open new markets for its products abroad and expand the existing markets by exporting high quality products. Jordan hopes to achieve that goal through bilateral protocols with different nations, he said.

"We believe that all issues related to farmers and farming are basic strategic problems at the political and security levels and the government is giving due attention to farmers' complaints

and trying to address them," Mr. Kabariti said.

Farm equipment can be provided at reasonable prices through the Jordan Valley Farmers Association, he said.

Mr. Kabariti said the government was seeking an equitable and fair solution to the problem of farmers' debts.

The government will help farmers to remain close to their lands as this will help the country to receive financial assistance from world organizations and donor nations on the one hand and increase food production on the other, he said.

He said Jordan can reach

world markets with its products if its exports are of high quality and packaged and graded in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Jordan has no alternative but to adopt modern and sound methods in producing and exporting its products to the world, he added.

The meeting was attended by deputies Ali Shatti and Hani Abbadi from the Jordan Valley district. Both expressed hope that the government will give due attention to the farmers' problems and complaints over the marketing of their products and in rescheduling their debts.

Opposition demands freezing of Israel ties

By Sa'eda Kilani
 Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Members of the Lower House of Parliament protested on Sunday against what they termed as Jewish attempts to dominate the Kingdom and called on the government to stop the process of normalization of relations with Israel.

At the beginning of the session, deputies from opposition groups in particular, contended that Israelis and Jews were threatening the political and social stability of the Kingdom and warned the government against condoning their activities.

Islamic Action Front (IAF) deputy Suleiman Sa'ad said that while the government should take a stand against Israel's "lack of commitment" to the accords it has signed with Jordan, it is permitting "the Jews to continue planting the seeds of corruption in the Kingdom."

According to the deputy, an Israeli team is shooting a documentary in Jerash about Solomon's temple that also shows obscene scenes.

"In the name of all citi-

zens in Jerash Governorate, I call on the government to order the shooting stopped," said Mr. Sa'ad.

Centrist Deputy Anwar Hadid complained that guides in the historic village of Umm Qais are propagating unfounded Jewish and Israeli theories. He quoted Jordanian women resident there as having overheard one guide telling Israeli tourists that Umm Qais was part of the "kingdom of Israel" and that its archaeological sites were part of the Israeli land.

Opposition Deputy Nazeem Ammarin called on the government to summon Jordan's Ambassador to Israel Omar Rifai and to stop the normalization process with Israel because of "Israel's ungrateful policy and its disrespect of the signed agreements."

Israel's policies "are a threat to our national security. The Talmud, fascist Likud policy aim at God forbid, implementing the alternate homeland (propagating the theory that Jordan is Palestine theory)," he said. "The government should freeze the normalization process."

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Efforts under way to convince Sarairoh to withdraw resignation

By Sa'eda Kilani
 Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Efforts to convince Minister of Post and Telecommunications Jamal Sarairoh to withdraw his resignation from the Cabinet continued Sunday but informed sources said these efforts were deadlocked due to Mr. Sarairoh's insistence not to reverse the decision he took Saturday.

An official source confirmed that several of Mr. Sarairoh's colleagues in the Cabinet and Parliament were mediating between Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti and Mr. Sarairoh but could not say whether he expected these efforts to succeed.

The government has made no official comment on the resignation.

Mr. Sarairoh submitted his resignation from the 31-member Cabinet on Saturday in protest against what he described as the prime minister's "haughty attitude and disrespect for his colleagues." He said he supported the government's policies but differed with

Mr. Kabariti over his style in dealing with Cabinet members.

A source close to the prime minister, however, rejected Mr. Sarairoh's charges, insisting that Mr. Kabariti deals with his ministerial team "with respect and appreciation." The source expressed "astonishment" at the accusations of Mr. Sarairoh who "has repeatedly said he supported the prime minister."

"If it is true that Mr. Kabariti deals with Cabinet members in the way Mr. Sarairoh described, how come it took him ten months to resign?" said the source who asked not to be named.

The official source told the Jordan Times that the resignation was a surprise to the Cabinet since Mr. Kabariti and Mr. Sarairoh "were on good terms and had never clashed." The source said the prime minister appreciates the "excellent job" Mr. Sarairoh has done at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, but said that "nothing can

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Russia opposes foreign military presence in Gulf

TEHRAN (AFP) — Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov said here on Sunday that his government was opposed to the growing U.S. and allied military presence in the Gulf, saying it was incompatible with peace and stability.

"It is in the interest of Iran and Russia not to have more foreign military presence in the Persian Gulf so that peace and stability is maintained," he said in a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati.

The United States and its main Western allies have increased their military presence in the Gulf since the 1991 Gulf war to protect the Gulf states against alleged threats from Iraq and Iran.

Mr. Primakov, who arrived here Sunday for a two-day visit, said his country welcomed any improvement of relations between Iran and its Arab

(Continued on page 7)

Hashimoto predicts no quick end to Peru hostage crisis, backs Fujimori

LIMA (Agencies) — Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto predicted on Sunday a resolution to the Peruvian hostage crisis was still a long way off, as Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori called on Marxist rebels to release their captives and surrender their weapons.

Pope John Paul II criticized the guerrillas and urged the gunmen to release the hostages in time for Christmas.

Mr. Hashimoto recalled Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda on Sunday morning after nearly three days of fruitless non-stop diplomacy, reflecting the lack of substantive talks, but gave his support to Mr. Fujimori's tough stance.

"A considerable time would be needed to resolve (the crisis)," Mr. Hashimoto told reporters.

Mr. Fujimori, in his first public statement since guerrillas from the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) raided the residence during a cocktail party on Tuesday, told the group to lay down their arms and free the hostages.

"In this way the possibility of force being used by the Peruvian state will be ruled out and from there, with all guarantees, a way out can be studied," he said in his speech, broadcast to

the nation late on Saturday. Well-known for his strong-arm tactics, Mr. Fujimori in his speech refused to give in to the MRTA's demands that he free more than 400 of their jailed comrades.

"It is clear that the freeing of those who perpetrated murders and terrorist attacks is unacceptable according to current Peruvian law and for reasons of national security," a stern-faced Fujimori said.

Mr. Fujimori's harsh words left the hostage crisis in stalemate on its fifth day, but Mr. Hashimoto threw Japan's full support behind his tough line, smoothing over earlier diplomatic differences between Lima and Tokyo on how to handle the crisis.

"We think we are at a stage where we shift our demands from the safety of the hostages to the immediate release of the hostages," Mr. Hashimoto said. "It is the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement's turn to respond."

The rebel group, which has threatened to kill the hostages if the government does not release jailed comrades, had no immediate response to Fujimori's proposal.

Mr. Ikeda, who has been in Lima to help with negotiations, said: "The proposal as a whole is the appropri-

ate solution to a peaceful resolution to the crisis and the preservation of the lives of the hostages."

He added that in a second meeting with Mr. Fujimori at government palace, the president seemed more confident than their first encounter.

"Although there is no change in his resolve to break the stalemate, I felt that in the earlier meeting, he seemed undecided about what exactly to do. But tonight, although he looked weary from concentration, I felt a sense of confidence from him that a way out will definitely open up."

Britain's Independent Sunday newspaper reported that the Marxist rebels were demanding a huge ransom from Japanese companies, including Mitsubishi, NEC and Toyota, in return for the release of some hostages.

The paper quoted a European diplomat as saying the MRTA was seeking several billion dollars from Japanese corporations whose executives are among the hostages.

But a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official in Tokyo dismissed the report as baseless. "We haven't heard anything at all about demands for cash from companies involved, or anyone else," he told

(Continued on page 7)

Politicians see peace treaty and new world order posing crucial questions to Jordan

By Lola Keilani
 Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The emerging regional and world orders and Jordan's signing of the peace treaty with Israel are posing crucial questions for the Kingdom's political and intellectual elite, political activists agreed at an Amman forum.

The activists, representing all shades of the Jordanian political spectrum, were addressing a six-day conference entitled "A Dialogue of Options" organized by the Jordan Writers Association (JWA).

Among those addressing the conference on Saturday, the first day, were Isa Madanat, leader of the Jordanian Unionist Democratic Party, Thouqan Hindawi,

senator and former minister, Taher Hikmat, senator and a former minister, and Labib Kamhawi, a political science professor and vice-president of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR).

The speakers discussed the possible scenarios which are currently facing the Jordanian state as a result of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement, which, in the view of some, was in fact moving the Kingdom away from being part of the Arab World into a new vague concept of a wider Mideast.

Mr. Madanat asserted that Israel was deviating from the spirit of the peace treaty it signed with Jordan by propagating the "Jordan-is-Palestine" theory through

its settlement policy in the Palestinian territories.

Mr. Madanat was implicitly voicing the Jordanian fears that expanded Jewish settlements meant a "transfer" of the Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan, thus posing a serious threat to the stability of the Kingdom.

Mr. Hindawi said that the peace treaty with Israel gave Jordan international recognition of its border and, as such, it was important for the Kingdom to have signed the treaty.

However, he said, the normalization of Jordanian-Israeli relations posed a serious threat to Jordan.

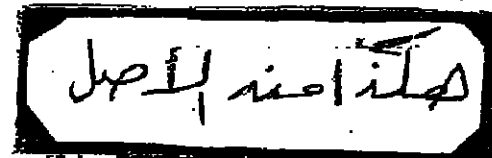
"It is not a military threat that Jordan faces from Israel," said Mr. Hindawi. "The threat lies in the con-

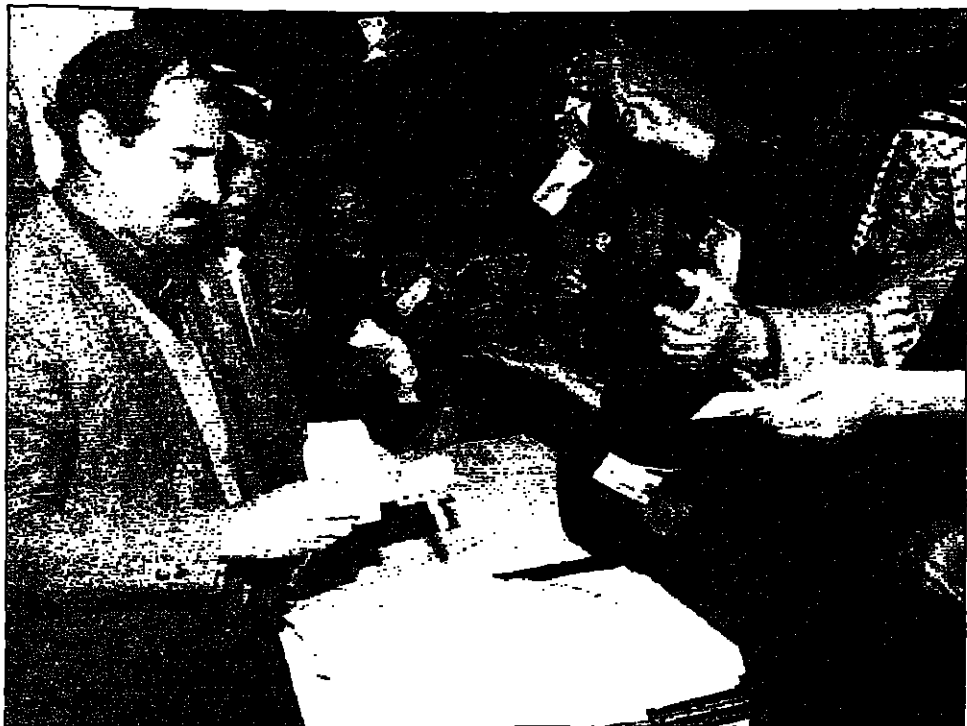
tinued Israeli policy of building settlements. Jordan is also being shifted away from other Arab countries and our culture and identity is under threat of an Israeli invasion."

The Israeli threat, said Mr. Hindawi, means normal relations with Israel and "cold and abnormal" relations with the Arab World. In light of the hard economic conditions, the current rate of unemployment, poverty and the attrition of the middle class, the Kingdom could not possibly stand as an equal partner to Israel within this relationship.

"The cultural threat" was discussed extensively by the speakers, who observed

(Continued on page 7)





Iraqi officials distribute new ration cards to Baghdad residents on Sunday. Iraq has said that food imports under its oil-for-food deal with the United Nations would enable it to boost the monthly food distribution (Reuters photo)

U.S. aid agency hands out relief supplies in Iraq

BAGHDAD (R) — A non-governmental U.S. relief agency on Sunday delivered blankets, medical supplies and powder milk to a number of hospitals in Baghdad.

The aid group, from the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S., said it had so far presented sanctions-hit Iraqis with relief supplies worth more than \$7 million since it started operating in the country six years ago.

Mel Lehman, the group's information director, said he and another U.S. col-

league, David Weaver from the Church World Service, chose to be in Iraq during Christmas to feel the suffering of the ordinary Iraqis.

Mr. Lehman said the group coordinated its activities with Iraq's Red Crescent Society and its Iraq operations were under a licence from the U.S. government.

He said the group concentrated on the supply of life-saving medicine to Iraq. "Iraqi hospitals are running short of such medicine," he said.

Four more U.S. citizens were in Baghdad late last month to protest against U.N. trade sanctions imposed for Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The citizens, members of a Chicago-based group, said their Baghdad visit was not sanctioned by the U.S. government and was in defiance of a warning by the Treasury Department of stiff penalties and long prison terms if they went ahead with it.

They had brought relief supplies worth \$10,000 with them.

Israeli trade fair to go ahead in Amman

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Organisers of an exhibition of Israeli products in Amman are going ahead with the event after a three-week postponement despite opposition from Jordanian political activists and businessmen associations.

A circular sent out by the organisers, International and National Expo Corporation (INEC), to news organisations inviting their representatives to cover the event, said the trade fair will open on Jan 6 and last until Jan 9.

Contacted by the Jordan Times, Fakhri Nasser, chief executive of INEC, declined to give further details of the event saying he would hold a press conference "at the end of this month to announce all details."

The Israeli trade exhibition, the first to be held in Jordan after the Kingdom and the Jewish state signed a peace treaty in October 1994, has drawn strong criticism from opposition parties and business organisations.

Opposition parties base their argument on their rejection of normalisation of relations with Israel and contend that the trade fair would only serve Israel's business interests of getting into the Arab market.

Business organisations argue that the time is not opportune for an Israeli trade fair in Jordan, given the stalled implementation of Israeli-Palestinian agreements. They also say that a strong message should be sent to hardline Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he could not hope for economic benefits of the peace process while he continues to refuse to acknowledge and respect Palestinian rights.

Opposition in Parliament, led by the Islamic Action Front (IAF) party, has called on the government to cancel the Israeli exhibition.

exhibition.

The government asserts that trade fairs, whether Israeli or otherwise, are the affairs of the private sector and points out that the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty provides for ties between the two countries. As such, officials say, the government has left it to the private sector to do whatever it finds fit to develop trade with Israel.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade said early this month that it had issued neither a permit nor a refusal for the event, which, it added, was beyond its realm and jurisdiction anyway.

The organisers contend that the Amman event could help send a strong message to Israeli businessmen that trade relations with Jordan and other Arab countries depend upon their government meeting the requirements of peace.

Three Israeli firms were among 70 companies which participated in an Amman exhibition this month of sophisticated equipment and light weapons for use by special forces. The Israeli participation drew strong criticism from the opposition, but the event went ahead anyway.

The Israeli trade fair, expected to be attended by manufacturers of textiles, jewelry, light electronic equipment etc., was scheduled to be held in mid-December.

But two days before the event was to open, the organisers announced a three-week postponement, which, they said, was warranted by the high number of Israeli firms wishing to take part. Before the postponement, the organisers said at least 80 Israeli companies were to participate in the event.

It was not immediately known how many would actually take part in the Jan. 6-9 exhibition.



CHRISTMAS SPIRIT: Sister Palmira, a Catholic nun who lives in Vatican City in Rome and is visiting the Holy Land for the first time, touches the 14-point silver star which marks the spot where Jesus Christ was born as she and another tourist reaches inside the small niche in the 'grotto' of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Sunday. Candles burn on either side of the star embedded in a marble floor. Christians are flocking to the town of Jesus' birth to celebrate Christmas (Reuters photo)

Stranded Palestinian children to go back to school, U.N. says

SALLOUM (AFP) — Palestinian children trapped with their refugee families in a tent camp on the Egyptian-Libyan border for 15 months are set to go back to school to make up for two lost years of education.

Some 250 Palestinians expelled by Libya last year are stuck at the border with Egypt with nowhere to go because they lack the proper documents.

"Until now our main concern was to provide these people with humanitarian relief aid but now we want to launch an educational programme for the 71 children under 16 who have been deprived of schooling for two years running," said Antonio Kamil, a senior official with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"We have received many urgent requests from the mothers of these children" to get them back to school, said Bassima Nafadi, a UNHCR spokeswoman in Cairo.

Earlier this month, the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in charge of Palestinian refugees sent a delegate, Ahmad Meheissen, to the 50-tent camp to select candidates for the back-to-school programme.

Mr. Meheissen was looking for university graduates among the refugees who could be trained by UNRWA experts to teach children in the camp.

"UNRWA is ready to send the necessary material for this project," said a U.N. delegate who declined to be identified.

"The children will be able to choose from the Palestinian or Egyptian curriculum and pass their exams at the end of the year under the aegis of the UNRWA," the delegate said.

Mr. Kamil said that two new families of refugees expelled by Libya in recent weeks have joined the tent camp, which is now also home to a citizen from Mali, another from Nigeria and a Somali.

Last year Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi ordered the expulsion of some 30,000 Palestinians in a move he called the "failure" of the 1995 autonomy accord which the Palestinians signed with Israel.

At the end of October 1995, Qadhafi allowed the Palestinians to return but around 300 stayed in the tent camp hoping that they would be allowed into Egypt or the autonomous territories.

Cairo refuses to let them in because they do not have proper documents or hold travel documents which have expired.

"This situation means that several Palestinians are unable to renew their Egyptian travel documents," Ms. Nafadi said.

In the desert, where temperatures vary between freezing and scorching, the refugees try to earn a meagre living selling tomatoes or sandwiches to travellers between Libya and Egypt.

Others are involved in smuggling operations, working for both Libyans and Egyptians.

18 stuck on Turkey-Libya border

Eighteen Palestinians stranded on the Turkey-Syria border for over two months after their expulsion from Libya on Sunday asked Ankara to help send them home, the Anatolia news agency said.

"We are helpless here, living in dreadful tents," Saleh Assad Dib, head of the 18 Palestinians, including 11

children, told the agency in the no-man's land between the two countries at the Cilvegözü border gate.

"We are asking the Turkish government to relieve us from our plight and send us home," said Mr. Dib, a former teacher who said he was expelled from Libya with his family in October after 23 years working there.

"After leaving Libya we arrived in Turkey, hoping to travel to Palestine by road and passing across Syria," he said. "However, the Syrians did not let us enter and we were also not allowed to return to Turkey."

"We have managed to live until now, thanks to the help of Turkish customs officers and truck drivers passing from the no-man's land," Mr. Dib said. "We have been eating what they give."

Turkish and Syrian authorities have made no statement on why the three Palestinian families were forced to stay in the no-man's land.

Invitations continue

Meanwhile Libya continued to invite "productive" Arabs to emigrate to the country, promising work, ownership and travel rights and permanent residency status.

A Libyan statement published in advertisement form in Kuwait's Al Rai Al Aam newspaper said Libya needed immigrants "to take part in building the ideal Arab society on the land of all Arabs (Libya)."

Libya's economy is stagnant partly due to sanctions imposed by the United Nations against the oil-rich state since 1992 over suspected Libyan involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Scotland in 1988 which killed 270 people.

Israeli officers 'protect' themselves with notes

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Senior Israeli officers have begun taking notes at meetings with government officials to protect themselves from any controversies or conflicts of interest, Israeli public radio reported on Sunday.

Israeli military officials said they take written notes at "all high-level meetings" because of the growing mistrust between themselves and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

In an unprecedented move by an Israeli premier, Netanyahu cited last week details of his meeting with the head of the internal security agency Shin Bet to diminish his responsibility in the opening of an archaeological tunnel in September in Arab East Jerusalem.

The tunnel sparked the worst clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in more than 30 years, leaving 86 dead.

According to Mr. Netanyahu, the transcript of the meeting proved that security officials recommended that the controversial tunnel be opened. The officials, however, have denied it.

The prime minister's spokesman, Shai Bazak, confirmed that senior officers were taking notes at their meetings with political officials, but added that "the practice was nothing new."

However, a former senior officer in military intelligence said the new practice represented a "real fracture" between the army and political leaders.

"It is serious that officers fear expressing themselves and must keep an account of their meetings to protect themselves in case of a problem," reserve army general Doron Tamir said on the radio.

UNHCR to leave Kurd refugee camp within month

GENEVA (R) — The United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said on Saturday it would phase out within one month operations at a Turkish Kurd refugee camp in northern Iraq which Turkey says is a guerrilla base for Kurdish rebels.

The last food and kerosene deliveries to the Atrush camp, which houses about 14,000 refugees, was made last weekend, it said in a statement.

The agency announced earlier that it would disband the camp because its work

was blocked by "activists" preventing refugees from going home.

Turkey has long sought the camp's closure, charging that it was a base for operations by the independence-seeking rebel Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK).

"The humanitarian and non-political nature of the camp has been compromised to such an extent that UNHCR is no longer in a position to provide services at this location," the refugee agency's statement said.

But it said it would continue to provide assistance to the refugees. "We are not abandoning the refugees, most of whom are women, children and old men. They will not be forced back to Turkey," said the agency's head, Sudoka Ogata.

"UNHCR will assist on an individual basis those who opt to stay in northern Iraq. But we can no longer assist a camp where people are deprived of their basic freedoms and which has become politicised to an unacceptable extent."

Local authorities are providing transport to move the refugees from Atrush to transit sites at Muqibla and Balqas where they will be assisted for up to one month while they make their decisions, the UNHCR said.

It said it would tell the refugees of Turkish government assurances that they would be welcomed if they wish to return home. It said Ogata expected the safety of the refugees to be fully respected by all parties during the transfer operation.

Atrush camp, 60 kilometres from the Turkish border, was set up for Kurds fleeing Turkey in 1994 into northern Iraqi territory controlled by the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party.

Kurdish villagers in southeast Turkey are caught in the middle of a guerrilla war between Turkish troops and PKK rebels fighting for autonomy or independence from Ankara. More than 21,000 people have been killed in the 12-year conflict.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05 The Muppet Show
14:30 Comedy — Dad's Army
16:00 Doc. — Nature's Inventions
16:30 Comedy — Hey Dad
17:00 News Flash
17:02 Doc. — Wild Flower
17:15 Drama — Dalton
18:00 Magazine — Cinq Sur Cinq
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Magazine — Cinq Sur Cinq
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Roseanne
20:00 Documentary — Disaster Chronicle
20:30 Cinema, Cinema
21:10 The Lazarus Man
22:00 News in English
22:25 Best Seller — Devices & Desires
23:15 Police drama — The Knock

PRAYER TIMES

05:05 Fajr
06:27 (Sunrise) Duha
11:34 Dhuhur
14:18 'Asr
16:41 Maghreb
18:04 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh. Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 623666
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel.
771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church
Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Armenian International Church
Tel. 827126
Evangelical Lutheran Church
Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel.
654932.
Church of Nazarene Tel.
675691.

The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel.
614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the
Department of Meteorology
Temperatures are expected to
rise slightly with skies partly
cloudy and winds northwesterly
moderate. On Tuesday, tempera-
tures are expected to rise further
with warm weather conditions
prevailing. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly
moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Amman 06/15
Aqaba 10/22
Deserts 05/17
Jordan Valley 12/21

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 14, Aqaba 21 Humidity
readings: Amman 82 per cent,
Aqaba 53 per cent.

USEFUL
TELEPHONE
NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Ayman Al Muhtaseb 875748
Dr. Arafat Al Ashhab 602507
Dr. Jamal Jbarah 847351
Dr. Abbas Al Hakim
..... 885446

Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Nairoukh pharmacy

Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Al'Anneh 250080
Al Quds pharmacy (—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Hital Al Sayyid 986702
Khalfef pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Dept. 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone
Repairs 623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
J. Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Co. 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue

630341
666126/37
664164/6
777101/3
775112/26
891611/15
602240/50
674155
6996732
865199

ZARQA:
Govt. Hospital
(09)963323
Zarqa National Hospital
(09)900560
Al Hikma Modern Hospital
(09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital
(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital
(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital
(02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital
(03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

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INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT
This information is supplied by
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department at the Queen
Alia International Airport Tel.
(08)53200-5, where it should
always be verified.

Al-Muasher Hospital

667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir 775112/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and
Special Surgery 865199

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Information on other flights

are supplied on phone 08
(52700)

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:15 Sanaa (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:55 Damascus (RJ)
09:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
09:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
09:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:05 Beirut (RJ)
10:15 New Delhi (RJ)
16:25 London (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam
(RJ)

22:15 Dhaka, Abu Dhabi (add)
(RJ)
23:10 Frankfurt (add) (RJ)
23:20 Casablanca, Tunis (RJ)
00:15 Bangkok, Jakarta (RJ)
00:30 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta,
Abu Dhabi (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

07:45 Khartoum (SD)
09:30 Cairo (MS)
12:00 Doha (Q7)
12:40 Bahrain (GF)
15:05 Vienna (OS)
21:00 Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:45 Athens, Beirut (OA)
00:30 London (BA)
01:30 Amsterdam, Damascus

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

09:20 Aqaba (RW)
20:50 Aqaba (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20 Beirut (RJ)
09:50 Casablanca (RJ)
11:00 Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
12:15 Cairo (RJ)
12:15 London (RJ)
12:50 Frankfurt (RJ)
17:00 Bangkok, Jakarta (add)
(RJ)

20:00 Abu Dhabi, Singapore
(add) (RJ)
20:00 Kuala Lumpur (add)
(RJ)
20:15 Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
21:15 Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)
23:00 Damascus (RJ)
23:15 Tozeer (add) (RJ)
23:50 Abu Dhabi (RJ)
06:15 Frankfurt (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

07:35 Beirut, London (BA)
07:45 Beirut (ME)
10:20 Cairo (MS)
13:00 Doha (Q7)
13:30 Bahrain (GF)
15:50 Vienna (OS)
21:00 Khartoum (SD)
22:50 Tel Aviv (LY)
23:55 Damascus, Paris (AF)
02:30 Amsterdam (KL)

03:00 Beirut, Athens (OA)

07:30 London (KA)
07:35 Damascus, London
(BA)

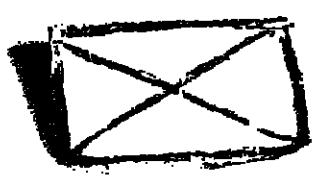
Royal Wings (RW) Flights
09:50 Marka Airport (from
QAIA) (RW)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN
Dep. Amman 8:00 am, every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 pm, every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 am, every Sunday
Arr. Amman 5:00 pm, every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple 700/500
Banana 550/550
Banana (imported) 850/600
Cabbage 60/40
Carrot 260/120
Cauliflower 130/100
Cucumber (large) 120/80
Cucumber (small) 210/160
Eggplant 140/80
Garlic 850/600
Grape fruit 150/100
Lemon 390/250
Marrow (large) 80/40
Marrow (small) 130/100
Onion (green) 160/100
Onion (dry) 170/80
Orange 560/400
Pepper (hot) 240/150
Pepper (sweet) 190/100
Potato 260/160
Spinach 150/100
String Bean 370/300
Tomato 150/100



HRH Prince Ali celebrates 21st birthday

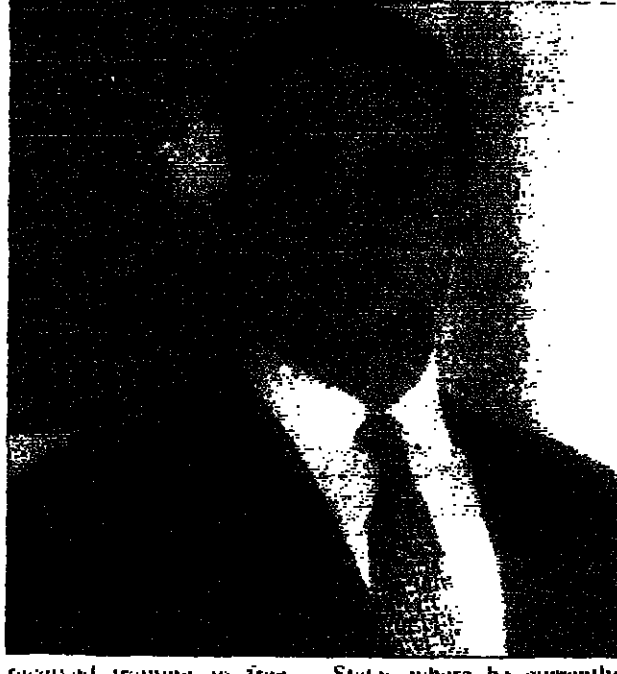
AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Prince Ali Ben Al Hussein today celebrates his 21st birthday.

He was born to His Majesty King Hussein and the late Queen Alia on Dec. 23, 1975 and received his elementary, junior and secondary education at the Islamic Scientific College and later at the American School and the International Baccalaureate School in Amman.

Prince Ali was enrolled at the Salisbury School in the United States where he completed his secondary education and graduated in June 1993.

In 1994 Prince Ali joined Sandhurst Military College where he won the Brunel Medal of Distinction and graduated with honours.

He joined the special forces corps of the Jordanian Armed Forces, took part in several military training courses and



received training in free-fall jumping from aircraft as well as in diving.

In Sept 1995 Prince Ali was admitted to Princeton University in the United States where he currently studies political science and history.

Prince Ali is the honorary president of the Prince Ali Club for the deaf and mute.

Srouf affirms parliamentary support for women's rights

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Saud Hayel Srouf Sunday affirmed that Parliament would, through laws and legislation, support women's efforts which, he said, aim to serve national interests.

Addressing a delegation, representing the Mafrag governorate's branch of the Jordanian Women's Union, Mr. Srouf said that the philosophy and strategy formulated and adopted by the union promise a brighter future.

He further stated that endeavours to promote the role of women in various fields is appreciated by the public.

Because Jordanian women enjoy full political rights and free education, he said, they are capable of exercising their distinguished role towards enriching the democratic process side by side with men.

During a workshop, chaired by Mr. Srouf, on Dec. 10 the House speaker urged women

activists to forward a proposal for new legislation or amendments to existing laws concerning women to Parliament.

"Hopefully, your recommendations will help us, in Parliament, to accelerate efforts in accomplishing legislation to ensure women their legal rights," Mr. Srouf told the participants in the meeting entitled "Women in Penal Legislation."

He listened to the delegation's requests, ideas, an outline of the union's regional activities and their aspirations and objectives.

Mr. Srouf lauded the union's endeavours and its drive to involve women in the various social, political and economic activities in the Kingdom.

The delegation members presented their union's demands and proposals for improving the status of women and expressed their appreciation of Parliamentary backing for women's aspirations.



Speaker of the House Saud Hayel Srouf Sunday meets with the Mafrag governorate branch of the Jordanian Women's Union to discuss legislation of women's issues. The meeting was also attended by Deputy Abdul Majid Al Aqtash at right (Islamist, Madaba) (Petra photo)

WHAT'S GOING ON

- FILM**
 - * "De Gaulle-Malraux, portraits croisés" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh at 8:30 p.m.
- CHRISTMAS EVE**
 - * Christmas eve eucharist at the Church of the Holy Redeemer on Tuesday 24 December at 11:00 p.m. (Tel. 813759).
- LECTURE**
 - * "Partnership, Architectural Heritage and Heritage Tourism" by Leen Fakhrouri at the Friends of Archaeology Centre (Tel. 696682) at 6:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

- * "Special show and sale of Christmas crafts at the Jordan Crafts Centre (Alaydi), Jabal Amman, Second Circle (Tel. 614555), until Dec. 31.
- * Christmas special at the Jordan River Designs showroom (hand-made ornaments and decorations), Jabal Amman, First Circle (Tel. 613081/2), until Dec. 31.
- * Works by Spanish painter Clara Amado at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman until 15 Jan.
- * Exhibition of colourful gifts and crafts designed by Andrea Atalla at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Nour Al Hussein Foundation, Wadi Sagra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Jan. 10.
- * Works by several artists entitled "The Artist and the Environment" by several artists at Alia Art Gallery, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 30.
- * Water colour works by Jabbar Mijbil entitled "Declared Hunches" at Orfali Art Gallery, Umm Uttheina, until Dec. 25.
- * Works by ten contemporary Indonesian artists entitled "From Scripts to Abstraction" at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (open daily except Tuesdays), until Jan. 12.
- * Painting exhibition by Hind Nasser at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre/Artisana, Jabal Amman (Tel. 647858), until Jan. 10. Also displaying a regular exhibition of arts and crafts and Christmas items.
- * Display of Christmas gift items at the Bani Hamida House, Jabal Amman (Tel. 658696/7) until Jan. 2.
- * Works by Rula Al Shuqairi at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until Jan. 4. Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists.
- * Works on the life of André Malraux at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until Dec. 24.

Jordan, Palestine attempt to resolve trade barriers

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian-Palestinian technical committee Sunday convened in Amman and according to the head of the Jordanian side, Secretary General of the Ministry of Industry and Trade Dr. Mohammad Smadi and his Palestinian counterpart Samir Huleileh, agreement was reached in principle on defining obstacles which impede trade across the bridges of the River Jordan.

The impediments were outlined that the two sides could later discuss such obstacles as well as their possible resolutions with Israeli authorities.

"The issue at hand has nothing to do with lists of commodities to be exchanged or customs

fees to be imposed but rather is connected with obstacles, which, once removed, would boost trade between Palestine and Jordan," Dr. Smadi said.

Last month, during a visit to Jordan, the head of a Palestinian economic and trade delegation said that the Palestinian Trade Promotion Corporation had issued \$20 million worth of licences to import products from Jordan but has only been able to buy \$3 million worth of goods from the Kingdom.

He said that Israeli restrictions at the bridges were barring the flow of goods between the two sides.

Dr. Smadi affirmed that in the past few weeks Jordan and Israel have

agreed to solve a number of issues pertaining to trade among Jordan, Palestine and Israel.

One of these problems is the back-to-back system of transporting Jordanian exports through crossing points in the Jordan Valley and Wadi Araba, he said.

On Dec. 13, Minister of Transport Nasser Lawzi stated that Israel agreed to allow Jordan to transport cement and oil directly to the occupied territories and that these shipments are expected to begin by January 1, 1997.

The new arrangement is part of an accord between Jordan and Israel regarding the replacement of the back-to-back system of transport which formerly entailed long delays and

inspections as well as the reloading of goods onto Israeli vehicles at the border.

Some of these problems have been resolved but in the next 10 days Jordan hopes to eradicate all other problems impeding trade, Dr. Smadi said.

He confirmed that Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority are now involved in gradually increasing the number of commodities traded between them until they reach a free trade without customs duty.

"We have agreed, in principle, to add more commodities to the lists of goods to be traded and the two sides are comparing the list with that agreed upon between Jordan and Israel and between Pales-

'Hair samples do not match in criminal case'

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A criminal laboratory expert testifying in the case of two men, facing the death penalty, Sunday told the Criminal Court that hair samples found in the victim's (Emil Khashram) hand was not that of any of the defendants.

The two, belonging to a group of 12 people of whom two have been acquitted, known as "Lidwan Mills," are being retried at the Criminal Court, after the Court of Cassation examined their case and returned it to the Criminal Court in April asking for a retrial.

Imad and Ayed Smadi, along with a third defendant Khader Mubarak, were found guilty of robbing and murdering Mr. Khashram, 70, in his Shmarnani home on Nov. 22, 1992.

Captain Hana Haddadin of the Criminal Laboratory, testified that she examined hair samples taken from the defendants and compared it to those found in Mr. Khashram's hands, but stated that the results "based on probability"

indicated that the hair samples did not match.

"My report is based on probability and not on definite results, and the probability is that the hair found in the victim's hand is not identical," she told the court.

The 10, all from the same family, received prison sentences ranging from 10 years to the death penalty, for committing a total of 230 crimes, including murder, armed robbery, theft, kidnapping and fraud.

When asked by Criminal Court Prosecutor Ali Abu Hjeleh whether there were folicles on the hair samples she tested, which are vital in determining blood type, the expert could not confirm if folicles existed.

At the end of court session, Mr. Abu Hjeleh asked the court to give the prosecution witness time to check the lab records to determine if hair folicles did exist. The court, headed by Judge Abdul Rahman Tawfiq which included Judges Ismail Hmozi and Mithel Mubedni, agreed and set Jan. 6 to hear the second testimony of Capt. Haddadin.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- Prime minister discusses projects with ICARDA**
AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti Sunday received Director General of the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) Adel Biltaji and the two discussed agricultural cooperation between Jordan and ICARDA. The meeting was also attended by Minister of Agriculture Mustafa Shneikha, who, in a separate meeting with Mr. Biltaji, discussed ICARDA plans to implement joint projects in the areas of agricultural research, water harvest, and field crops.
- JUST signs agreement with Iraqi university**
RAMTHA (Petra) — Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) and the Iraqi Mustansiriyah University Sunday signed an executive programme of cultural and scientific cooperation. The two universities have agreed to seconding teaching staff from one university to the other and will participate in conferences and seminars organised by both. The programme also provides for the exchange of visits by heads of scientific departments and teaching staff, and student delegations.

Two women killed in alleged 'crimes of honour'

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Madaba authorities Sunday reported that a 22-year-old man was apprehended Thursday for killing his aunt in the Theban town of Madaba for her alleged involvement in "immoral affairs."

Ra'ed Murad Sa'ed turned himself in shortly after he reportedly shot and killed his 23-year-old aunt Reem Sa'ed in her father's house, according to official sources.

An official, who preferred anonymity, said the suspect told the authorities that he killed his aunt to defend his family's honour as she went out with a man.

According to the source, the victim, a third-year student at Muta University, met a man who worked as a bus driver two months prior to the incident who wanted to marry her, but her family refused.

"Instead, Reem was engaged to one of her cousins," the source told the Jordan Times Sunday.

Two days prior to the incident, the source maintained, the victim met with the man that she wished to marry, "her family knew about it and urged Ra'ed to kill her to cleanse their honour."

On the morning of the incident, the source added, the suspect monitored the victim's house, and when her mother left the house and she was alone, he entered and began to argue with her.

"[Ra'ed] asked Reem about her alleged affair and she told him that it was none of his business, he became angry, drew a gun and shot her three times in the head and chest," the source said.

Also in Irbid, a 35 year-old divorced woman was shot and killed by her brother last week in a building in Shahid street in downtown Irbid, according to an official source.

According to the source, the woman was shot three times in the chest by her brother for alleged adultery.

He turned himself into police immediately following the incident. Officials would not release names nor any information regarding the motives of the murder other than "it was a crime of honour."

Police said they were investigating both incidents.

The two women killed last week, reportedly killed in "honour crimes" in the Kingdom since January 14.

Meanwhile, Madaba police are investigating the death of two people, found in a car which had slid in a steep valley near Ma'een Spas Friday, official sources said.

"Preliminary investigations indicate that the owner of the car might have forgotten to pull the hand-brake in his car and therefore his vehicle, which was parked near the edge, rolled down and rested in the valley," the source said.

The owner of the car, in his early 40s and the other passenger, a woman in her early 30s, were not identified by officials.

Police said they were investigating the incident.

Christmasweets

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Yaish Center
phone 825881

NEW SHMEISANI BRANCH

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What do kids really want for Christmas?

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Gardens St.
(Soon)
Sweifieh Branch

Toys Shop
Alahlia-Abela

Taleban claim Afghan opposition attack repulsed

KABUL (AFP) — The Taleban militia has repulsed an attack by opposition forces in the strategic Tagab Valley northeast of Kabul, Taleban-controlled Radio Shariat reported Sunday.

The report said rival forces launched an attack on the Islamic militia at 9:00 p.m. (1630 GMT) Saturday, but no ground was lost and 20 opposition soldiers were taken prisoner.

The Tagab Valley runs north from the town of Sarobi, 70 kilometres east of Kabul, with the southern part controlled by the Islamic militia and the north by forces loyal to the ousted government's military Commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

The valley is currently the only open road link between Taleban and opposition-controlled areas, with other highway closed by fighting

or blocked by snow and ice.

Fighting in the district is said to have been mainly minor skirmishes so far, but an AFP correspondent travelling through the valley Saturday reported increased military presence of both rival factions.

The Taleban — who control Tagab village, the district centre — have brought up a number of tanks and rocket launchers.

Mr. Masood's forces were seen digging in on hilltops and assuming positions in mud buildings up to two kilometres from the village.

No independent confirmation of the Radio Shariat attack report was immediately available, but a spokesman for Mr. Masood said Saturday that there would be an increase of the Taleban in Tagab in the coming weeks.

Mr. Masood has enlisted the support of ex-rival Commanders Zardad, Chaman and Qalam, who previously controlled Sarobi before it was overrun by the Taleban before they took Kabul in September.

A spokesman for Mr. Masood said the commanders would be returning to the valley in the next few days to renew contacts and build up forces for a major assault on the Taleban.

The Tagab Valley was the scene of heavy fighting between rival factions in 1993 and 1994, causing up to 60,000 civilians to flee the area to camps near the Pakistan border.

Many of those who fled have now returned to the mainly agricultural district, but aid workers fear renewed fighting could lead to a new flood of displaced persons leaving the area.

21 militants reported killed in Algeria

ALGIERS (Agencies) — Algerian security forces killed 21 armed Islamic militants near here Saturday, the Liberte and L'Authentique newspapers reported Sunday.

A total of 18 members of a rebel faction of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) were killed after a five-hour gun battle at Haouch El Mekhfi, near Meftah, 30 kilometres southeast of Algiers.

The militants were hiding out in a bunker dug under horticultural glasshouses, its entrance hidden behind refuse and scrap iron.

The rebel faction was led by Miloud Hobbli, also known as Hassan Abou El Walid, who announced a split with the GIA leadership in July.

About El Walid was not among the dead, but two of his top lieutenants were killed in the clash.

Security forces also recovered two Kalashnikov assault rifles, around 15 pistols and a number of grenades.

Also Saturday, security forces killed three Islamic militants near a cemetery in the southwest Algiers suburb of Beni-Messous. The militants were armed with automatic pistols.

The GIA has claimed responsibility for many of the attacks carried out since Islamic extremists took up arms against the military-backed regime in 1992.

More than 50,000 people are believed to have died in the fighting.

Meanwhile, a bomb explosion killed a secondary school girl and wounded another Saturday outside a school in the coastal province of Tipaza, 60 kilometres

west of Algiers, Algerian security forces said.

A statement by the official Algerian News Agency (APS) said security forces reported the explosion occurred at 12.10 a.m. (1110 GMT) in the town of Douaouda.

Muslim guerrillas have been blamed for the deaths of 49 civilians this month in the neighbouring province of Blida, including 20 bus passengers.

Another 60 civilians died in November in Blida and Algiers in guerrilla raids and bombings, including 10 killed by a car bomb in Algiers's southwestern suburb of Birkhadem.

In Washington, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service Saturday confirmed that it has detained an Algerian Islamic militant who was reportedly seeking political asylum in the United States.

INS spokesman Russ Bergeron, confirming a report in Sunday editions of the Washington Post, said Anwar Haddam was arrested on Dec. 6, a day after the expiration of the "parole" status that allowed him to remain legally in the United States.

Mr. Haddam, who came to the United States in 1992 and has since served as a U.S.-based spokesman for Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, had applied for political asylum, according to the post.

Mr. Bergeron, citing U.S. privacy laws, could not confirm that Mr. Haddam had been seeking asylum, but said his "petition" had been denied by an immigration court on Oct. 3. He also could give no reason why

the petition was denied.

Mr. Haddam was among 188 Islamic militants who won seats in Algeria's legislature in the first round of an election in December 1991. The Algerian army then intervened to cancel a runoff in January 1992, preventing a victory by the Islamic Salvation Front, also known as the FIS.

The government outlawed the group and jailed or exiled its members, including Haddam.

Haddam initially fled to France, which expelled him in 1992. He faces arrests if he returns to either France or Algeria.

Mr. Bergeron said Mr. Haddam had appeared twice before an immigration court, but his case had been continued.

Eventually, an immigration court will have to decide whether Mr. Haddam should be expelled, he said.

Mr. Haddam is married and has four children, three of whom are U.S. citizens because they were born here, Mr. Bergeron said.

Mr. Haddam is renewing his request for political asylum from his cell at an INS detention facility, the Post reported.

It said he had also been served with a civil lawsuit by seven Algerian and French plaintiffs who are seeking unspecified damages for "crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other gross human rights and humanitarian law violations."

The plaintiffs accused Mr. Haddam and the FIS of involvement in assassinations, torture, hijacking, sexual violence against women and sex-based apartheid, the Post reported.

Car bomb injures one in Belfast amid fears of Christmas violence

BELFAST (AFP) — A car bomb blast in a Catholic area of Belfast Sunday wounded a nationalist leader, two days after an attempted murder claimed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), heightening fears of an escalation of violence.

Initial police reports said the blast in the Ardoyne district of northern Belfast, occurred outside the home of Eddie Copeland, who is a well-known nationalist leader.

Mr. Copeland had just left his home and got into his car when the bomb, believed to have been placed beneath the vehicle, exploded. He was taken to hospital with leg injuries.

"I think it is potentially the beginning of a spiral," David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, close to the loyalist militia, said after Sunday's attack.

On Friday, the IRA claimed responsibility for an attack in a predominantly nationalist area of West Belfast in which a policeman was shot and slightly injured.

The claim came just as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) warned the public to be on the alert amid fears of a renewed IRA bombing campaign in the province during the Christmas period.

"Police are warning the public to be particularly vigilant in light of recent terrorist activity," an RUC statement said.

It was "especially concerning that there is a threat facing the community" after the discovery of several arms caches as well as the thwarting of an IRA operation on the border between Ireland and the province.

The IRA, which seeks to unite Northern Ireland with the Irish Republic, ended a 17-month ceasefire in February with a London bomb that left two dead, and has since carried out a series of attacks both in mainland Britain and in Northern Ireland.

Its political wing, Sinn Fein, has been barred from ongoing multi-party talks on Northern Ireland's future until the ceasefire is renewed.

The latest attacks have raised fears that loyalist paramilitaries, who draw support from the Protestant community and are campaigning for the continuation of British rule in the province, will also call off their ceasefire.

On Sunday, more than 1,000 people marched through the streets of Belfast calling for peace.

Among the demonstra-

tors, Catholic and Protestant alike, were several Northern Irish singers.

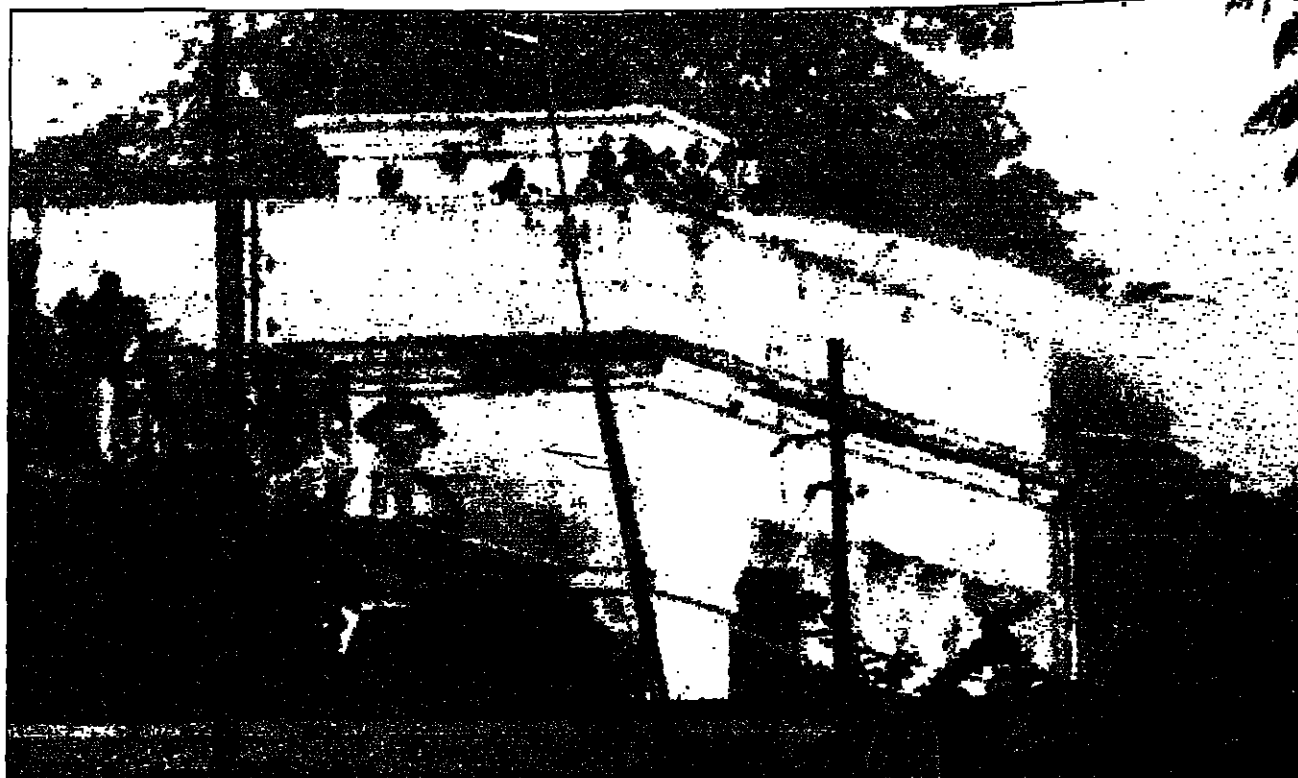
One of them Brian Kennedy, born in a Catholic nationalist district of West Belfast, said a mark of progress was that he did not believe such a demonstration would have been possible 20 years ago.

"One of the great things is it brings people together for a while," he told reporters. "It's particularly important for children from different communities. If they spend more time together then there's hope."

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Ian Adamson, added: "People are still asking for peace, demanding peace, and I know that in the end they will get it."

However, organisers said they were disappointed at the relatively small turnout. "It's a big disappointment. I would have thought more people would have come. The events of the last few days are so depressing I think they have lost their enthusiasm for peace," Peter McQuade said.

Mr. Copeland was shot and seriously wounded by a British soldier during the funeral of Thomas Begley, an IRA extremist blown up by a bomb he was carrying in October, 1993.



Security forces, perched on roof-tops, fire a water cannon at revolting prisoners in Jessore Sunday. At least four prisoners and one policeman were killed during a raid which ended the prisoner's week-long mutiny (Reuters photo)

5 die as Bangladesh police end prison revolt

DHAKA (R) — Security forces opened fire and used teargas, water cannon and a bulldozer to storm a prison in Bangladesh Sunday, crushing a revolt by inmates in fighting which left at least five dead, police said.

More than 200 other prisoners were injured when security forces raided the prison in Jessore early Sunday, crashing through prison gates and a barricade erected by inmates before rounding up some 2,700 mutineers.

The raid ended the week-long uprising, the last of four which broke out across the country in the past

week. Police said one police officer was among the dead. At least 30 security men were admitted to hospitals.

"Armed prisoners shot dead Constable Rafiqul Islam," Police Superintendent Ali Imam Chowdhury, who led the 3-1/2 hour operation, told Reuters.

Police recovered one revolver, one home-made gun and huge number of spears, knives and iron rods from the prisoners.

He said: "Police did fire shots but not all the deaths came from our firing. We found one prisoner hanged by the mutineers suspecting him a government informer."

"We swung into action only after the prisoners defied our last-minute call to surrender," Mr. Chowdhury said.

The prisoners set piles of blankets on fire to block the entry of about 1,500 armed police into the jail.

The Jessore prisoners began their revolt Monday, setting off unrest in three other prisons, including the high-security Dhaka Central Jail.

Witnesses said hundreds of anxious relatives crowded outside the prison and many of them seen weeping.

The mutiny was triggered by the release of 90 prisoners under an amnesty marking the country's 25th inde-

pendence anniversary Monday. Prisoners, angered at being excluded from the amnesty, demanded freedom while others sought better treatment and food.

On Friday, prisoners in the Dhaka Central Jail rebelled but were overpowered by guards after a brief fight in which 15 guards and 35 inmates were injured.

The revolt in northwestern Tangail town by prisoners who kept six guards and officials hostage ended peacefully Thursday after a local politician persuaded them to return to their cells. A mutiny in southern barisal jail Thursday was suppressed within an hour by security forces.

Gingrich admits misleading House ethics panel

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich admitted Saturday he had submitted erroneous information to the House Ethics Committee, as charged by the panel, but said he had not intended to mislead it.

"With great sadness, I have filed an answer which admits to that violation," Mr. Gingrich, second-in-line to succeed the president, said in a statement about filing false information.

He said he regretted having "brought down on the people's House a controversy which could weaken the faith people have in their government."

"In responding to complaints in this matter, I did not manage the effort intensely enough to thoroughly direct or review information being submitted to the committee on my behalf."

"In my name and over my signature, inaccurate, incomplete and unreliable statements were given to (the) committee, but I did not intend to mislead the committee," Mr. Gingrich, a Georgia Republican, said.

"I accept responsibility for this, and I deeply regret it," he added. "I did not seek personal gain, but my actions did not reflect creditably on the House of Representatives."

His statement was released at the same time as the Ethics Investigative Sub-committee issued a statement of alleged violations against Mr. Gingrich, who is seeking to become the first Republican to be re-elected House speaker in 68 years.

At the centre of the ethics probe was the use of tax-deductible charitable contributions to a college course Mr. Gingrich taught from 1993 to 1995. Federal tax laws bar the use of tax-deductible contributions to further a partisan political agenda.

House Republican leaders rallied around Mr. Gingrich with an eye to minimising any damage to his prospects for reelection as speaker when the new Congress convenes on Jan. 7.

Lebed calls on Yeltsin to resign

MOSCOW (AFP) — Former Russian security chief Alexander Lebed said Sunday that President Boris Yeltsin was too ill to govern and should quit, as the Russian leader prepared to return to the Kremlin after a six-month absence for heart surgery.

"The president is too ill to run the country. It is time for him to resign and go and rest," Gen. Lebed said in an interview with Moscow Echo radio.

Gen. Lebed said Mr. Yeltsin, who underwent a quintuple heart bypass operation on Nov. 5, was "quite simply a very sick man."

"When there is a very ill man at his side there is a regent who is running the country. He is a man that no one has ever elected and that no one will ever elect. I am categorically opposed to that," Gen. Lebed said.

Gen. Lebed was referring to the highly influential head of the presidential administration Anatoly Chubais, who is said to have gained influence since Mr. Yeltsin's illness.

Gen. Lebed's comments came as Mr. Yeltsin prepared to head back to work, insisting his recovery was complete.

"The convalescence is over. I will be back at work in the Kremlin at 9:00 a.m. Monday," Mr. Yeltsin said in a televised address to the

nation Friday, adding: "The country needs an active and energetic president."

The Russian leader was due Sunday to move from his residence at Zavidovo, 100 kilometres northwest of the capital, to his dacha at Gorky-9, 20 kilometres west of Moscow, from where he will commute daily to the Kremlin.

Gen. Lebed said, however, that he had "knowledge of a file" which made clear the convalescence was not over, but gave no details.

Gen. Lebed's remarks were denied Sunday by those close to Mr. Yeltsin. "I believe the doctors, who tell us the president will maintain his ability to work and will be active for 10 years," Sergei Filatov, the former head of the presidential administration, said.

The president's circle hope the return to the Kremlin will put an end to rumours about Mr. Yeltsin's health. The Russian leader already has key events scheduled, including meetings with his German, French and U.S. counterparts over the next three months.

It is not the first time that Gen. Lebed has questioned the Russian leader's ability to work. On Friday, the German ZDF Television channel broadcast an interview in which he said Mr. Yeltsin

had begun drinking again.

"We have reason to think that the (presidential) election will take place before 2000 ... the president has started drinking again, and he is forbidden to drink," Gen. Lebed said.

Mr. Yeltsin was elected in July to a second term, until 2000, but poor health has kept him out of the Kremlin for the last six months.

He appointed Gen. Lebed head of the Security Council after the popular Afghan veteran came third in the first round of presidential elections with 15 per cent of the vote.

Opinion polls now suggest that Gen. Lebed, who was fired in October, is the most likely candidate to win backing for a bid to succeed Mr. Yeltsin.

He looks set to keep up the pressure in the coming weeks. On Thursday he is scheduled to mark his return to active politics with announcement of the creation of a new political party.

He is also due to say whether or not he will run for governor in his stronghold of Tula, 200 kilometres south of Moscow.

Gen. Lebed's doubts about Mr. Yeltsin's health were echoed in opposition ranks.

Nationalist deputy Sergei Baburin told Echo Moscow: "For the moment I have no proof of the president's ability to resume his functions."

Russian minister: Cold war is not over

MOSCOW (R) — Russian Defence Minister Igor Rodionov said in a television interview broadcast Saturday that the cold war with the United States was not over.

"I think the cold war is not yet over, to a certain extent," Mr. Rodionov told Russian Television in an interview recorded as he returned from meetings at NATO Headquarters in Brussels Wednesday.

"There exist two countries, Russia and the United States, with powerful nuclear potentials capable of destroying the globe and turning each other into dust," he said. "Is there a 100 per cent guarantee that a possible conflict can be avoided?"

At a news conference Wednesday, Mr. Rodionov said that NATO members wanted to expand the alliance as a curb against Russia.

"The position is as follows. NATO enlargement to the east is unacceptable to Russia," Mr. Rodionov said.

"We don't understand why other countries are being taken on board and Russia is being ignored," he said, warning exclusion could mean "a return to the bad old days of the cold war."

NATO had hoped that Mr. Rodionov would take the first concrete step towards a charter after Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov said last week Moscow was ready to talk despite opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement plans.

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Kashmir militant: Western hostages killed

NEW DELHI (R) — The Indian Express newspaper reported Sunday a jailed member of the Kashmiri militant group that kidnapped four Western hostages had told Indian interrogators they were killed last December by their captors.

The "confessions" of Nasir Mehmood, described by the Express as a financial chief of Kashmir's Harkat Ul Ansar group, tallied with fears expressed recently to Reuters by Western diplomats searching for the tourists.

Indian officials say the militants who kidnapped Britons Keith Mangan and Paul Wells, American Donald Hutchings and German Dirk Hasert in the Pahalgam region of Kashmir in July 1995 were members of the Pakistan-based Harkat.

Two other men were taken hostage at the same time. John Childs, an American, was allowed to escape after a couple of days as he had a bad leg and became a burden to his captors.

Hans Christian Ostro, a Norwegian, was killed in August, 1995, after one of his captors was overcome by anger with Ostro's repeated attempts to escape, Mr. Mehmood said.

Mr. Mehmood said the remaining four hostages were killed after Indian security forces killed one of the main members of the Al Faran — the name given to the shadowy guerrilla group that abducted the tourists on holiday in the Himalayan state of Kashmir and Jammu.

"Al Faran is believed to be connected to Harkat, but Harkat has denied any ties to Al Faran."

"Under these circumstances, and perhaps keeping in mind that the Al Faran had already given a press note to the effect that the army had taken away the hostages, Sikander (the codename of a captor) ordered the execution of the four remaining hostages," Mr. Mehmood said.

"Accordingly, the foreigners were killed on Dec. 13, 1995, in the Magam area of Kokanag and buried in the jungles there."

"The exact location where they were buried was kept a secret as was desired by the group," he said. Western diplomats speaking privately said they feared the four hostages were killed in December last year after Al Faran militant and key captor Abdul Hamid Turki was killed by Indian security forces.

"Our fear is that they are not alive," one diplomat said. "They were most likely killed in December after one of the militants was killed."

The newspaper report said Mr. Mehmood named five Pakistanis and a Turk as the main members of Al Faran.

Mr. Mehmood said Ostro was shot by Turki, the Turkish member of Al Faran, who then beheaded the body.

Mr. Mehmood in his interrogation said the hard core group had disobeyed Harkat leaders in initially carrying out the kidnapping, but remained in contact with the Harkat leadership, including himself.

He also described the Harkat leadership as becoming increasingly riven by squabbling.

Mr. Mehmood said the Pakistan government pressed the Harkat leaders in Pakistan to persuade Al Faran to release the hostages.

But the local leaders refused to release the foreigners unless the Indian government released a number of Harkat leaders held in New Delhi's maximum security Thar Jail.

Mr. Mehmood is being held in Thar.

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian Express reported Sunday that a militant group had killed four Western hostages they were holding in Kashmir. The group, which is part of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, said it had killed the hostages after they refused to leave the area. The group also said it had killed a British diplomat and a Canadian diplomat who were in the area. The group said it had killed the hostages because they were "collaborators" with the Indian government. The group also said it had killed the diplomats because they were "traitors" to the cause of Kashmiri independence.

World News

Serb Students keep up pressure; Milosevic organises counter-rallies

BELGRADE (Agencies) — Dozens of students embarked on a long-distance march Wednesday in an effort to keep up pressure on Slobodan Milosevic to recognise opposition election victories.

Even while the Serbian president was taking a conciliatory line toward their demands, his lieutenants were organising counter-rallies and using state media to attack his opponents as tools of foreign powers.

Thirty-seven students marched from Kragujevac, 120 kilometres from Belgrade with an open letter they hoped to present to Mr. Milosevic. On Tuesday, 17 students arrived in Belgrade from Nis, twice as far from the capital, and met briefly with the Serbian president.

"We are on a walk of freedom and truth, and we are going to Belgrade to help our fellow students," said Miroslav Miskovic, one of the marchers.

Mr. Kragujevac, an industrial city, has been hit hard by unemployment and other economic woes during Mr. Milosevic's nearly 10 years in power.

More protests by students and the political opposition were planned in Belgrade Wednesday. Tuesday's demonstration drew the largest crowd in a month of protests — about 200,000 people.

State TV Tuesday evening launched its fiercest attack to date against the demonstrators, broadcasting footage of a pro-Milosevic rally in the eastern town of Majdanpek.

People interviewed parroted state media propaganda that the opposition was controlled by foreign powers, citing the display of German and American flags at the Belgrade demonstrations.

Two more pro-Milosevic rallies were planned for Wednesday, in Sremska Mitrovica and Vranje.

Protesters denied that they were being used by foreign powers to undermine Serbia.

The Nis students gave Milosevic documentation they said showed that election results in the city were falsified. The students said he promised to investigate the charges, without taking personal responsibility.

Leading AIDS researcher named Time's Man of the Year

NEW YORK (AP) — Time magazine named Dr. David Ho, a leading AIDS researcher, as its "Man of the Year" Saturday.

Dr. Ho, the scientific director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center which has been in the vanguard of the battle against AIDS in the medical community, pioneered the use of drug "cocktails" to combat HIV, providing the first glimmers of hope to people with AIDS for better and longer lives.

"When the history of this era is written, it is likely that the men and women who turned the tide on AIDS will be seen as true heroes of the age," Time said in a statement.

"For helping lift a death sentence...on tens of thousands of AIDS sufferers, and for pioneering the treatment that might, just might, lead to a cure, David Ho is Time's Man of the Year for 1996," the magazine said.

"Some people make headlines while others make history," Time noted in its accompanying article.

The past year has seen the greatest advancement in the medical fight against AIDS since the epidemic began 15 years ago, largely through the development of protease inhibitors which when combined with other anti-HIV drugs often reduce the amount of virus in the blood to undetectable levels.

"My colleagues and I are greatly appreciative of this recognition," Dr. Ho said in a statement.

"While there is finally reason for optimism...much work remains to be done. These advances represent an improvement in treatment, not a cure. We have seen HIV stagger, but this tough foe has not been knocked down," Dr. Ho, a virologist and professor at Rockefeller University, said.

Chechen bomb blast kills 5 boys

MOSCOW (AFP) — A bomb blast killed five boys aged between 10 and 12 Sunday as they played in a village near the Chechen capital Grozny. First Deputy Prime Minister Movlady Udogov said.

The remote-controlled bomb exploded by the side of a road in the village of Berkat-Yurt at 10 a.m. (0700 GMT), the minister said, quoted by Russian news agencies.

"The bomb was remote-controlled, it was a premeditated explosion," Interfax quoted Mr. Udogov as saying.

Sunday's attack follows a week of violence in the breakaway republic.

The Chechen government, which is dominated by separatists, has accused Russian secret services of trying to destabilise the country ahead of presidential and legislative elections on Jan. 27.

The vote is likely to return the separatists to power after 21 months of war between Chechnya and Russia, which ended with signature of a peace treaty in August.

But Mr. Udogov insisted the recent unrest should not be allowed to torpedo the vote.

"The election should take place on the scheduled date," he said.

Aslan Maskhadov, former commander of separatist forces and prime minister of the coalition government, travelled to Berkat-Yurt to take part in funeral ceremonies for the dead children, who were buried on the day they died in accordance with Chechen tradition.

He also ordered Chechnya's Vice Prime Minister Ruslan Kutayev to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of international observers and the Russian-speaking population.

The new wave of violence began with the murder of six foreign Red Cross workers who were shot by masked gunmen in the hospital where they worked Tuesday.

The following night, six Russian civilians were killed, with no apparent motive, by unknown assailants in two private houses in Grozny.

Overnight Friday to Saturday, four other Russian civilians from a single family were killed in their home, also in Grozny, again without obvious motive.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian organisations have suspended operations in Chechnya in the wake of Tuesday's carnage.

On Sunday, representatives of various Chechen associations urged the international bodies to resume their humanitarian aid to the war-torn republic. ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

In a statement addressed to the ICRC and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the Chechen organisations denounced the "barbarous" murder of the six medical employees and vowed to do "everything possible to find and punish the guilty parties."

Rivals clash in Zaire; new government delayed

KINSHASA (AP) — Supporters of two opposition leaders in Zaire clashed in the capital Kinshasa Saturday as political leaders tried to hammer out a special government to handle a rebel war in the country's eastern region.

With tension running high in the capital over who should be the next prime minister, President Mobutu Sese Seko agreed to delay the formation of a crisis government to guide the country in its war with Rwandan-backed rebels, state radio said.

State radio, quoting Mr. Mobutu's security adviser Honore Ngbunda, said Zaire's hickering politicians had been given until early next week to nominate a government.

"Marshal Mobutu responded positively to a 48-hour extension of time requested by the politicians," the Voice of Zaire said in a Saturday headline given by Mr. Mobutu passed. Party leaders expect a new government to be in place by Monday.

A spokesman for politician Frederic Kibassa Maliba said two bodyguards of Mr. Kibassa, who heads a breakaway faction of the opposition alliance led by former Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi, were wounded in the clash in Limete district.

Jostling over the post of prime minister has stoked tension in Kinshasa since Mr. Mobutu returned this week from a long stay in Europe and called for a crisis team to tackle the rebels fighting in eastern Zaire.

He appointed a new army chief and reorganised the military hierarchy to boost morale in his defeated army. But the political skirmishing in the capital appeared to pose a new crisis away from the battlefield, political analysts said.

Mr. Tshisekedi's supporters have given a warning of trouble in Kinshasa if the radical opposition leader is not brought back to the position of prime minister that he held briefly.

"Supporters of Mr. Tshisekedi arrived this morning at their party headquarters for a meeting. But they wanted to prevent Mr. Kibassa's supporters from entering his (Kibassa's) house which is situated just next door," spokesman Prosper Ndunda said.

Witness Mubenga Amand said Mr. Kibassa's bodyguards responded by opening fire in the air.

As the 48-hour, deadline set by Mobutu for the new government passed, there was still heated debate among political parties taking part in meetings on who should lead the cabinet.

Supporters of Mr. Kibassa's faction of the UDPS alliance of radical opposition parties have put his name forward as a candidate. But incumbent Prime Minister Kengo Wa Dondo has support among many members of Mr. Mobutu's Popular Movement (MPR) who say Mr. Kengo represents stability, political sources said.

Other radical opposition groups and even some MPR members lined up behind Mr. Tshisekedi, who commands huge popularity among Kinshasa's teeming population of urban poor, the sources said.

Mr. Tshisekedi's UDPS has so far not taken part in the political party consultations initiated by Mobutu Thursday, two days after returning home from four months of cancer surgery and rest in Europe.

Pakistan premier concedes defeat in war on election corruption

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's interim government has conceded defeat in its battle against political corruption, announcing that it will allow thousands of candidates registered to contest February's general election.

The caretaker Prime Minister Malik Meraj Khalid said his administration had not found enough proof to act against corrupt politicians, as Saturday's registration deadline for the Feb. 3 election passed.

Addressing the Lahore High Court Bar Association Saturday, the prime minister said corruption cases had been registered and some top officials arrested, but courts had released many for lack of evidence.

Mr. Khalid was appointed by President Farooq Ahmad Leghari to guide the country through new elections after the dramatic dismissal of Benazir Bhutto as prime minister on Nov. 5.

Mr. Leghari accused Ms. Bhutto of corruption and misuse and ordered the interim administration to carry out a purge.

Press reports have made a several accusations against politicians, but Mr. Khalid said no proof had been left. In most cases records have been removed by government officials, he said.

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Right move

IT IS quite heartening that only one month after establishing that rented cars driven by young people are responsible for many fatalities on our roads, the Ministry of Interior issued new regulations aimed at limiting irresponsible behaviours by car rental offices and drivers.

The ministry's move came in the wake of the shocking finding that 30 per cent of rented cars were involved in road accidents in the first eight months of this year. Much of the credit for highlighting the carnage caused by rented cars goes to the Jordanian Society for the Prevention of Road Accidents.

The first step the authorities are taking in this regard is to curtail the number of rental offices. This, the authorities hope to achieve, by introducing new conditions that all car rental offices would have to meet. The new regulations apply stiff penalties on offices which lease their vehicles to people who are less than 25 years of age even when they have valid driving licences.

Given the proportions of the problem created by rented automobiles, the new conditions should apply to all people wishing to rent a car regardless of their citizenship. We certainly do not want to see a set of rules apply to Jordanian drivers and another to foreigners. Many of the rented cars involved in serious accidents are driven by non-Jordanians. Such a category of drivers should come also within the scope of the additional rules.

The moral responsibility for reducing the number of accidents through rests with car rental office owners. When 1,250 rental cars have been involved in road accidents in the first eight months of 1996, it becomes the direct responsibility of rental offices to exercise more discretion before they put dangerous drivers behind the steering wheels. Some legal measures should hold rental places accountable when they are found to have exercised ill-judgement leading to criminal negligence when renting their cars. Accountability is sure to make rental offices more discriminating when they lease their vehicles. The fact that there are so many people involved in this line of business indicates that the margin of profit is rather high even though so many of their cars are involved in major road accidents. This free-for-all market obviously calls for stiff regulations. The government did right to step in at last to control it.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i said Sunday that the internal problems plaguing Israel could steer it towards launching war on the Arabs as a way out of the present situation and in a bid, on the part of the present Israeli government, to unify the Israeli society. Fahed Faneh said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not enjoy the support of the majority of his people: a recent public opinion poll in Israel showed that only 38 per cent have confidence in him. But, at the same time, the poll revealed that 63 per cent of the Israelis expect their government to wage war on the Arab countries, he noted. The writer said that Mr. Netanyahu's procrastination and delays in implementing the accords with the Palestinians and in reaching a settlement with Lebanon and Syria are motivated by his desire to unite the Israeli public behind him in the face of the common Arab foe. Mr. Netanyahu hopes that enmity and hostility towards the Arabs can unite the people of the Jewish state while peace can only pave the ground for internal differences that divide them, according to the writer. He said the Arabs should not remain passive in the face of this situation, but should rather strengthen their intrinsic force in the face of any eventuality.

A WRITER for Al Dostour said in light of the present Israeli position, which poses a grave danger to Jordan as well as the other Arab countries, the government must adopt and practise new principles and stands at the political level. The government is invited to raise the subject of Israel's settlements at the national level and should direct the Jordanian public and the Arab World towards appropriate measures to counter the danger inherent in the Israeli settlements policy, said Taher Adwan. What Mr. Netanyahu is doing now is delivering a blow to all peace accords as his government is involved in building more settlements, Judaizing the Arab city of Jerusalem and refusing to comply with the requirements of peace, he noted. The writer said that Jordan should take the initiative in convening a meeting of Arab states, including Palestine, Egypt, Syria as well as Jordan itself, to discuss this Israeli challenge at the highest level because Mr. Netanyahu's present policies pose a direct danger to Jordan and the Palestinians and an indirect danger to other Arab states. What is needed from Arab countries, he suggested, is to translate statements of condemnation into practical plans to launch worldwide campaigns and to adopt a collective national stand that would deter Mr. Netanyahu from pursuing his present aggressive plans in the region.

Economic Review

What can one learn from a Big Mac?

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur

THE AMAZING McDonald's has finally made it to Jordan and not a day too soon. It opened in Amman with a fanfare that overshadowed the opening of other U.S.-born food joints such as Pizza Hut, Subway and Kenny Rogers. The long lines of customers on opening day and the mile of cars with their passengers patiently waiting for their turn in the drive-through line may be new to Jordan, but not to McDonald's. After all, a few years ago, when McDonald's first opened in Moscow offering the big Mac at a price that equalled the average monthly salary of a factory worker, it produced much noise in Western media and was even heralded as a sign of the victory of Western capitalism over socialism and planned economic systems. The large sales of McDonald's in London, a few years before the Moscow event, was seen to signal the success of the American free market system over the then labour-state-almost-socialist economy of Britain. The opening of McDonald's has always been viewed as the sign of capitalism or Americanism beating some monster or other "ism".

However, the common thread among these events is that when McDonald's opened, there the unemployment rate was considerably high; Moscow and London were suffering from high unemployment rates, just like Amman. Therefore, people had little to lose by waiting, because their time was worth very little in the job market. In other words, people had little or zero opportunity cost — the cost of forgone opportunity. This means that people whose time has very little relative value are the ones willing to wait, which can be easily discerned from a quick investigation of the lines of customers waiting for entry to the "Golden Arches" of McDonald's. The majority of the clients were youth and teenagers at or below high school age, housewives and children, which are segments of society that are not considered to be part of the labour force and therefore have little or no opportunity cost.

But this is not all that an economist can say about the opening of a new McDonald's because McDonald's ushers in a country the practice of quality and standard setting. It is true that a person can purchase the same exact McDonald's hamburger at any McDonald's around the globe. The customer is guaranteed the same taste and flavour. Quality standards are rigid and identical everywhere, which assures all customers of the outcome of their purchases. The sesame seeds, the bread bun, the meat patty, and the French fries will taste the same anywhere in the world, and that is an achievement by itself. The famous Big Mac has been used by economists to establish purchasing power parities (PPP) among nations, which is a way of viewing and comparing the different exchange rates, prices and interest rates across countries. The idea is simple yet ingenious: since the Big Mac is identical in France to the one in London, one can easily establish the value of the British pound relative to the French franc by measuring how much is paid in each of the two countries for the same product. (Almost three hundred years ago, Adam Smith said: "It is not for its own sake that men desire money, but for the sake of what they can purchase with it".)

Why were the McDonald's lines so long relative to other food franchises that opened in Jordan? Advertising. Every time a person purchases a McDonald's product in the U.S., he/she is actually advertising for the product in Amman. And any time McDonald's corporation pays for an add somewhere in the globe, it is actually helping the sales of its product everywhere. Why? Because of standardisation.

But standards are hard to keep. And, indeed, quality assurance and standardisation will prove to be great additions to Jordanian

business practices. As businesses and people learn the rewards of standardisation, they too will come to demand it in all products and cause production quality to rise and never fall. The existence of such large chains will provide in time the know-how and learning-by-following to Jordanian businesses, big and small.

McDonald's brought with it to Jordan the hourly wage-rate concept, whereby people work by the hour and are compensated for their labour, measured by the number of hours they have worked. This is a genuine improvement, which, if employed in Jordan, would lead labourers to take less time for prayer, reduce absenteeism due to social events, such as attending the death or marriage ceremonies of relatives and friends during office hours, and make the appreciation of time more consistent with that of industrial nations.

Also, the history of McDonald's attests to the value of smart marketing and market segmentation techniques. In light of the health awareness phenomena of the last two decades, the McDonald's meal, which is not the nutrition-conscious healthy choice, could have been dead commercially by now and McDonald's should have been wiped out two decades ago. It did not, though, because it introduced low-fat burgers, replaced lard with vegetable oil which is lower in cholesterol and introduced the playrooms and the Happy Meals for children. The last two items were major contributors to the survival of McDonald's as it became the place to take the kids. For a few dollars, one could take the kids to eat, play in a child-safe environment and even get a toy with their Happy Meal. Great marketing!

In spite of all the above, the advent of McDonald's in Jordan has underscored a very important aspect: behaviour towards the customer. Jordanians hail from an authoritarian society that believes in power and control. Waiters, therefore, believe that the best way to act is like a police force and cause the customer to feel ill at ease. For example, I took my son a few days ago to celebrate his eighth birthday at McDonald's, a tradition that was started by his grandparents in the U.S. There, he was supposed to play with his friends, eat a clean, enjoyable meal and receive a gift in addition to the gifts he received from us. The pushing and shoving in the lines was somewhat annoying but not as annoying as the workers who banned the kids, including my son, from playing in the play room because another child's parents had reserved the room for their son's birthday, a practice that is unheard of at any McDonald's in the developed world (developed being the operative word here): playgrounds are public spaces available to all children who have purchased the product. They should not be reserved because reservation means exclusion. The tears and pains of children should never be caused by the mediocrity of behaviour, and never by a sophisticated, modern management. Upon calling the manager and displaying my disbelief and anger at such behaviour, the children were allowed to play for a few minutes only to be sent out a while later.

Then, as we sat to eat our hamburgers and reminisce about the good old days, two waitresses approached us and told us that we had to move to another table because they wanted to cordon off the area where we sat in order to give another birthday party a sealed atmosphere.

And there and then the thought struck me that yes, the Big Mac that I was holding was probably the same as the one I held in several other countries, but the enjoyment was gone because nobody seemed to have told these young managers that you do not displease several people to please one: that is bad for business.

Hebron — deciding the fate of the peace process

By Michael Jansen

IT IS not surprising that on the eve of the visit by U.S. envoy Dennis Ross, Palestine President Yasser Arafat should state his hope that this time the U.S. will not be biased towards Israel in the ongoing negotiations on Israeli long-overdue withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian West Bank town of Hebron. Or that Arafat should state a preference for European, over American, mediation.

In the last round of discussions attended by Ross in October, the American adopted a completely biased attitude, backing up Israel in its demands on the Palestinians. And since then there have been several key developments which would seem to indicate that the U.S. is no less biased today than it was in October. In spite of the fact that the American election season had passed with the incumbent president securing another four years. The Arabs, particularly Palestinian peace makers, had been counting on the Americans to use their leverage with Israel to secure the expansion of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, in accordance with the Oslo II agreement signed in Washington in September 1995.

The foremost of these developments was the weak U.S. response to Israel's decision, taken last week, to restore financial incentives to encourage Israelis to settle in the occupied Palestinian territories and to subsidise those already settled in. The U.S. stance was merely that this decision was "unhelpful" and "complicating" at a very delicate phase in the peace process. A press question compelled President Bill Clinton to agree that settlements were, indeed, "obstacles to peace" but not to do anything about trying to block Israel from setting up such obstacles.

Clinton's reaction to this clear Israeli provocation to the Palestinians was tempered by political possibilities, narrowed by the victory of the Republicans in both Houses of Congress in the November poll. The president's room for manoeuvre was squeezed even more tightly last week when the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Jesse Helms, sent a letter of support to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, following a missive dispatched by eight prominent politicians — including former secretaries of state James Baker, Cyrus Vance and Lawrence Eagleburger — calling upon him to abide by

Israel's commitments in accords reached with the Palestinians and to end settlement. Although Helms' letter was designed to diminish the impact of the first episode, it perhaps heightened awareness that there is something very wrong in Washington.

On the other hand, Arafat, more than ever, would like to see Europe, which has adopted a truly even-handed policy, become a full partner in the peace process.

Europe must take over from Clinton and his second term administration which is unlikely to be more firm with Israel than it was during his first term. This is because he is, personally, the most pro-Israel president who ever sat in the White House and because he is a prisoner of Congress (and of right-wing Republicans like Jesse Helms) which must approve his domestic agenda (and even his cabinet and ambassadorial appointments). If Clinton is to score some successes during his second term, he must cooperate with the powers that be in Congress and the lobbies which call the shots in Congress — most particularly to Zionist lobby which is now split between Likud and Labour, with the Likud having more influence with the Republican congressional majority.

A Palestinian source deeply involved in the peace talks told the Jordan Times that in October, Ross pressed the Palestinians to make concessions instead of insisting that Israel implement existing agreements. "The Americans only give us promises... We don't call" the present contacts "negotiations", we call them "talks" because we are not negotiating but simply trying to make them implement what has been agreed. What we want is a timetable for Israel to implement what has not been implemented in the interim accords, withdrawal from areas B and C, the villages and countryside of the West Bank. Their main demand is for us to provide security for their settlers."

Although both Israelis and Americans continue to dwell on the "security aspects" of the Hebron redeployment, it is really this linkage which they cannot swallow. The Israelis, with the Americans in tow, want to go directly to final status negotiations, suspended since May by Israel, in order to freeze the situation on the ground in the occupied West Bank so that Israel can go on building its settlements in order to preempt the outcome of the final status talks.

If the new proposals, which

Dennis Ross claims he is bringing to the talks this weekend, only confirm Israeli demands, they will simply add to the already "breath-taking pressure."

To quote another Palestinian official, being exerted on the Palestinian side by U.S. and Israel. And if there is no linkage between the Hebron redeployment and an Israeli pullout, Hebron will become the first, and probably the last, piece of Palestinian real estate to be turned over to the Palestinians by the Likud regime.

This being the case, the remarks made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's media adviser, David Bar Ilan, concerning the Israeli acceptance of a Palestinian state, must be counted on as so much public relations nonsense. Or rather a public relations attempt to camouflage what Israel is really doing on the ground in the West Bank.

Since signing the Oslo I accord in September 1993, Israel has seized another 300,000 dunums of Palestinian land in the West Bank, raising by ten per cent the 3 million dunums already expropriated out of 5.8 million dunums making up the total area of the West Bank. If this goes on, there will be nothing in areas B and C to discuss about, it will all be settled by the Israelis.

If the Americans and Israelis succeed in pressuring President Yasser Arafat into capitulating over linkage, this week or later on, the Hebron deal could be the end of the peace process.

LETTERS

Unacceptable distortion

To the Editor:

IN WHAT is obviously a cheap shot aimed at further distorting the Arabs and their image, two Germans studying Arabic language in Jordan tried, in a letter to the editor, "Unacceptable glorification" (Jordan Times, Dec. 22, 1996), to portray Arabs as brutes who attempt daily "to glorify the killing of millions of people as a shining era in German history."

Gott Nordbunch and Theo Latzel accused Arabs, all Arabs, of endorsing the killing of Jews at the hands of Germans under Hitler during the Third Reich. The two guilt-burdened Germans based their generalisation on a handful of experiences they say they have encountered in Amman. That is utterly unacceptable. It bespeaks ignorance and reveals a confused mentality trying to overcome its guilt by blaming it on others.

Not all Arabs are guilty of endorsing crimes against humanity if a few among their ranks, driven by the crimes Israel has committed against their people, fail to sympathise with the suffering of the Jews who cause the suffering of their people in Palestine, Lebanon and occupied Syrian lands.

There are Germans, Americans, Britons and others who glorify the killing of Arabs at the hands of Israeli Jews, using arms that Germany and the United States helped pay for. That is no grounds for seeing all Germans and Americans and Britons as anti Arabs engaged in the glorification of inhuman acts.

The two Germans say they are very sensitive to the acts of Hitler and the Third Reich. That is their problem, even though it was the Arabs who have ended up paying for Hitler's crimes. Israel was established on Arab Palestine and not in Germany. The two German's sensitivity to the guilt of their forefathers should not render them insensitive to other people and their suffering. The two Germans have obviously failed to understand the Jordan in which they say they enjoy living. Their letter is an insult to their hosts, a falsification of reality and an example of the superficiality and inherent bias with which many Westerners approach the Arab World.

A. Hussein, Amman.

Human Rights File

The right to life starts with food and water

By Waleed M. Sadi

THE MULTI-ministerial committee commissioned last month by the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment, Dr. Abdul Razzak Tubeishat, to examine the issue of food and water contamination in the country gave these items a clean bill of health.

The report that was made public by the minister was based on "intensive" examination of samples of foods, water, soil and even breast milk, conducted by several groups, including the Royal Scientific Society (RSS), the University of Jordan and the concerned ministries.

What prompted the tests was the years-old national scare about the condition of the foods we eat and the water we consume, brought about by excessive use of pesticides, insecticides and other chemicals which were feared to be carcinogenic. This is not to mention the air we breathe.

That fear was reinforced when a brave female graduate student, specialising in biology at the University of Jordan, prepared a study, under direct supervision from the department of biological sciences, that substantiated the long-held view that there is an unusually high residue of DDT in Jordanian mothers' milk.

The cause was the continued import of the banned DDT and the uncontrolled use of pesticides and insecticides throughout the country.

I, and many like-minded concerned citizens, may not have the right to challenge the findings of the governmental committee or those of the University of Jordan, since they are technical in nature and cannot be disputed except by scientists well versed in the subject of pollution and food contamination.

Yet, I know what everyone in the country already knows, that neither the Ministry of Agriculture nor the Ministry of Health have exercised complete control over the deployment of chemicals: farmers, for example, are known to have abused the use of pesticides, insecticides and hormones, with little or no effective supervision from the concerned authorities. Even more damaging to the government's case is the allegation that the country continued to import DDT up to 1996.

Against this backdrop, to state now in categorical terms that all is well with the food we eat and the water we drink may not correspond fully with reality. There is hardly a precedent for governmental agencies to admit wrongdoing, especially in the developing world. The temptation to whitewash everything that might be wrong must be presumed to exist in most countries, especially the ones whose democratic process has yet to run its full course.

Transparency and accountability are features of only fully grown democracies. The laboratory examination conducted by the University of Jordan

student appears thorough and cannot be easily dismissed or brushed aside. There is no apparent evil motivation or biased perspective on the part of the bold student who carried out her tests out of concern for health.

If the ministries of agriculture and health still dispute the veracity or accuracy of the university's report, the only remaining course of action is to conduct another examination by a team of independent experts.

The right to life supercedes all other human rights and must be pursued with vigour, honesty and determination. The sooner the government commissions this urgently called for study the better for all concerned about the health of Jordanians.

Instead of reporting just the results of its report on the subject, I think it would be infinitely more useful for the government to have the initial report of the student, as well as the governmental report containing state rebuttals, published in full in the Jordanian dailies and subjected to double checks not only by laymen but also by scientists from the private sector.

The fact that there is a dramatic rise in cancer cases in the country demonstrates that the problem is serious. As we may or may not take comfort from the assurances that all is well with our food and water, our vigilance must never be relaxed and the issue should be kept alive and subject to periodic examinations by governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Above all, the government must show more sensitivity to people's concerns. Whenever there are conflicting reports on health issues, the worst must be presumed to be closer to reality. It would be a big relief if the ministers of health and agriculture took time to make field trips to animal and agricultural farms on periodic basis to check if all is well and up to standard there.

Our authorities must demonstrate that they truly care about threats to life in Jordan, whatever the sources are. The concerned people in government have yet to prove to the public that they are keeping a close watch over the foods we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

The fact that no official has called for a ban on imports of cars that use leaded gasoline is yet another proof of indifference to public health. It would be relatively easy to shift to safe fuel if all newly imported vehicles were made to meet minimum international standards on safety. The fact that no official, high-ranking or otherwise, has even thought about taking such an initiative till now substantiates public fears that the government does not care really enough about public health. The fact that food and drink street vendors go on selling their products to unsuspecting public is an added proof that there is a lot more that needs to be done to give full faith and credit to the most basic human right of all, namely, the right to life.

News

Jordan Times, Monday, December 23, 1996

U.S. increases pressure on Israelis, Palestinians

(Continued from page 1)

Following a first round of talks with Mr. Netanyahu, Mr. Ross met into the early hours of Sunday with Mr. Arafat and most of his senior negotiators.

Mr. Arafat was publicly upbeat following the talks, calling them "very constructive and fruitful."

"We have to push forward the peace process by all our means," he said. "We hope that we reach an agreement (on Hebron) soon." Mr. Ross was careful to avoid touting any false hopes, presenting his task as a fact-finding tour for Mr. Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

"The important thing I am trying to do is re-energise the process, then go back in a couple of days to report to the president and

secretary," he said.

Other Palestinian leaders were openly wary of the new U.S. initiative following a blunt statement by Mr. Christopher last week blaming the Palestinians for the stalemate over Hebron.

"The Israelis have made some moves in connection with Hebron. It is time for the Palestinians, for Chairman Arafat, to respond to those moves," Mr. Christopher had said in announcing Mr. Ross's mission.

Palestinians made clear this is not how they view the situation.

Under the Oslo interim self-rule accord signed by Israel's previous Labour government in 1995, Israel should withdraw its troops from some 65 per cent of Hebron and hand municipal control over the whole city of 120,000 to Mr. Arafat's

National Authority (PNA). Israel was to keep troops only in enclaves where some 420 zealous Jewish settlers live.

But since coming to power in June at the head of a right-wing government, Mr. Netanyahu has insisted on maintaining a broad mandate for his army in Hebron and on limiting the freedom of Palestinian police there.

Nabil Shuath, a senior Palestinian official, said Sunday that the new U.S. position amounted to a "dangerous compromise" that rewarded Israel's refusal to implement the Oslo accords as signed.

The Palestinians are also demanding a precise timetable for Israeli implementation of other extensions of self-rule, but Israel has refused.

After hearing the Pales-

tinian side, Mr. Ross held a rapid-fire series of meetings with Israeli leaders Sunday, seeing Foreign Minister David Levy and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

He was due to meet Mr. Netanyahu again later in the day and was expected to then return to Gaza City for more talks with Mr. Arafat.

At the same time chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat met top Netanyahu aide Yitzhak Molkho in Jerusalem for parallel talks, officials said.

Israeli officials, meanwhile, were optimistic over Washington's new tack.

"I hope the Palestinian Authority will now understand that it does no good to stall in hopes of building up international pressure on Israel," Mr. Levy said.

Peace treaty, world order pose crucial questions

(Continued from page 1)

that only the Arabs were expected to normalise ties but not the other way.

"Ending the state of war does not necessarily mean ending the struggle," said Dr. Kambawi.

Dr. Kambawi stressed that a Mideast culture will take over the Arab culture, noting that the Islamic identity is being associated with "backwardness."

Israel is still occupying Arab land and that "signing of a document" does not in fact mean peace, Dr. Kambawi said.

The situation is still difficult and the parties which have signed the peace treaty are still demanding their rights, he said.

Taher Hikmat, a former minister of justice, said because the world has turned into a global village, cultural confrontation was bound to take place.

States such as Jordan, with a strong cultural heritage as an Arab and Islamic country, need to maintain its identity and stand up to the challenges by taking precautionary measures, which are normally

taken by other countries in same conditions, he said.

"The Kingdom took such a step in 1988 when it drafted the National Charter. I believe that it should reassess its current position in order to pinpoint strong and weak points and be more flexible amid the fast international developments," said Mr. Hikmat.

Historian Ali Mahafzah, who tackled the "philosophy of the Jordanian state," stressed that political discourse in the country changed every time to explain the different Jordanian policies at the different stages of the Kingdom's history.

"The Kingdom does not have a philosophy," he stressed repeatedly.

From 1946 to 1967, Jordan adopted the Palestinian problem, based its legitimacy on the Great Arab Revolt, was an ally to Britain, believed and called for the unity of greater Syria. "This stand changed repeatedly," he said.

The Palestinian problem, from the 1967 war until 1989, was addressed differently. After April 1989, national issues such as internal

unity, freedom of the press and political parties were strong. After 1994, the Jewish state and Israel were referred to part of "the children of Abraham and as our cousins."

The new "Mideastern order" was the topic discussed on the second day of the symposium.

Speakers included Taher Masri, a deputy and former prime minister, Hamad Al Farhan, a prominent politician and Wasel Azer, general manager of the Business Bank. They totally rejected the "Mideast formula" Mr. Farhan named it the new "Sykes-Picot" formula.

The new "Mideastern order" is currently in the making, they said.

Mr. Masri said the new status of Jordan as a non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally of the U.S. and unannounced negotiations between Jordan and Turkey will be accepted once there is a Palestinian state. "Otherwise I cannot accept this new concept, because we will not be treated as equals," The Oslo agreement is an example of

imposing the political will of others on us."

Foreign powers are promoting "the new Mideast project" because it means open markets for their industries, said Mr. Farhan.

"This new 'Sykes-Picot' formula means destroying the possibility of one united Arab World because it is a combination of Arab and non-Arab countries under one umbrella," he said.

"There will no longer be the Mashreq. As for the Maghreb countries they will be looking towards their northern European borders," he said.

Among the options, the speakers said, there could be more positive inter-Arab relations. The first step, they said, could be an open Arab market.

"Jordan and Palestine should start this trend. They will be later followed by Syria, Iraq and Lebanon," said Mr. Azer, stressing that only through such an arrangement can the Arab World be up to the new challenges of a new Mideast partnership with Europe and accession to the World Trade Organisation.

Hashimoto predicts no quick end to Peru hostage crisis, backs Fujimori

(Continued from page 1)

reporters.

"We have not received such demands here nor at headquarters in Japan," a senior Toyota representative in Lima told Reuters.

MRTA leader Nestor Cerpa had earlier promised gradually to free all hostages not linked to the government. Rebels have released over 100 hostages since the start of the crisis. All of the remaining captives are men.

In Rome, the Pope told pilgrims in St. Peter's Square in his weekly Angelus message: "I cannot help but criticise such a cruel and immoral type of coercion."

"Violence does not construct the future of a people," he added, speaking in Spanish.

"I hope with all my heart that the people detained in the Japanese embassy (residence) in Lima can celebrate Christmas in freedom together with their families," he said.

Inside the residence, victims spent their fifth night sleeping on the floor in cramped and smelly suits, suffering from stinking overcrowded toilets, poor food, stifling heat and overcrowding, red cross officials said.

The latest in a series of hand-written messages to

the outside, held up to a window of the residence, read: "Mr. President, please, order the restoration of water, light and telephone."

It was not clear whether Sunday's message was an appeal directly from the captives or was drafted on orders from the hostage-takers.

Additional signs were placed at windows later Sunday, including one in Japanese, on the same subject.

The Lima government cut utilities to the compound Thursday in a bid to put pressure on the rebels.

The captives include around a dozen ambassadors, numerous foreign officials and dignitaries and senior Peruvian government officials.

Thousands of Peruvians prepared to march through the capital to the Japanese embassy residence to demand a peaceful and quick resolution to the standoff.

The rebels released a group of 38 hostages on Friday. The freed captives read a statement from the MRTA saying the "only possible solution (to the crisis) is to meet our demands."

In a communique from mirta headquarters, apparently written before Mr.

Fujimori's speech, the rebel group warned that commandos had been ordered to attack economic and military targets around the nation if the government ordered a strike on the residence.

The guerrillas are seeking the release of 453 of their comrades currently jailed by the Fujimori government.

Mr. Fujimori's message came just hours after MRTA leader Nestor Cerpa Cartolini said the commando was willing to release more hostages depending on the government's actions.

The MRTA headquarters communique said, however, that "the Peruvian government, and some (other) governments are taking these shows of flexibility as weakness which ... places the lives of their compatriots in danger."

"This grave error compromises the physical integrity of the prisoners of war," according to the faxed statement sent to AFP minutes after the end of Mr. Fujimori's speech.

It was the first time since Wednesday that the armed group referred to its initial threats to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. No injuries or casualties have been reported so far in the standoff.

Opposition demands freezing of Israel ties

(Continued from page 1)

The government did not react.

The atmosphere in the House was very calm on Sunday evening. Ministers seemed mellow and did not reply to any of the deputies' questions. They were not either seen talking to each other and moving around as usual.

Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti stayed for a while and left. Only 20 ministers from the 31-member cabinet attended the session.

The House did not address the resignation of Minister of Telecommunications Jamal Saraireh, did not attend Sunday's session. Sources said that some ministers, such as Minister of Higher Education Abdullah Ensour, were at Mr. Saraireh's house in an effort to dissuade him from his decision.

The House endorsed agreements on oil exploration in Jordan; the first between the Natural Resources Authority (NRA) and Trans Global and the second between the NRA and ANADARCO.

(Continued from page 1)

neighbours across the Gulf, notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Iran and the UAE are locked in a dispute over the three strategic Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb and the issue has been stumbling block to improving relations between Iran and its Arab neighbours.

Mr. Velayati said his first round of talks with Iranian officials were "direct and friendly" and that they intended to boost ties in "all areas."

He said that the discussions included conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan as well as that between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The two sides also discussed disarmament in the Gulf, the minister said without elaborating.

Earlier, Mr. Velayati proposed "collective" cooperation with the Gulf Arab states and Iraq to maintain regional security, rather than turning to Western countries.

"We offer collective cooperation with the regional countries of the

Persian Gulf and even Iraq to create a friendly atmosphere and preserve security," Mr. Velayati said on the margins of a seminar on Gulf stability which opened here on Sunday.

"The first step is to take positive strides in a bid to create an atmosphere of trust so that foreign countries would not have an excuse to intervene with their massive forces and create tension," he said.

But the minister said his country was not opposed to cooperation between the Gulf Arab states and Western countries.

Iran has repeatedly scolded its Arab neighbours for allowing the presence of Western, notably U.S., forces in the Gulf region.

Mr. Primakov, on his first visit to Iran as foreign minister, was expected to hold talks with President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Parliamentary Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri and his deputy Hassan Ruhani.

Mr. Primakov said his trip here was not in defiance of any other country, a reference to the United States, which has pressured Russia to sever links with Iran because of Tehran's alleged support of terrorism.

Russia's assistance in completing a civilian nuclear power plant in the southern Iranian port of Bushehr has provoked sharp criticism from Washington, which also accuses Tehran of seeking

to acquire nuclear

weapons. Tehran and Moscow were also expected to discuss the Middle East situation as well as trilateral cooperation, including Turkmenistan, to develop oil reserves in the oil-rich Caspian Sea.

The three countries, all bordering on the Caspian, along with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, agreed last month to set up a joint company to develop the sea's mineral resources on an equal basis. Iran has been sharply critical of the unilateral exploitation of the sea's energy resources by Azerbaijan in cooperation with a Western consortium and is working to develop a legal status to govern the sea's resources.

Efforts under way to convince Saraireh

(Continued from page 1)

be done if he insists on his resignation."

Mr. Saraireh, a deputy from Karak, was absent from Sunday's Lower House of Parliament's ses-

sion and his resignation was not brought up at the House. Ministers and deputies refused to publicly comment on the subject. Informed sources said Mr. Saraireh, who supported the prime minister dur-

ing the Karak riots, resigned over differences with Mr. Kabariti over senior appointments at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and the Telecommunications Corporation.

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Saudi Arabian players and supporters jubilate winning the Asia Cup trophy Saturday after beating UAE through the penalty shoot-out 4-2 in the final in Abu Dhabi (Reuters photo)

Saudis rule Asia as Japan, South Korea disappoint

ABU DHABI (R) — Saudi Arabia took full advantage of a loss of form by 2002 World Cup co-hosts Japan and South Korea to win the Asian Cup for the third time.

The Saudis beat the United Arab Emirates 4-2 on penalties in the final on Saturday, having played 34 minutes with 10 men in a goalless draw after extra time.

Japan and South Korea, who with Saudi Arabia were the pre-cup favourites, were disappointing in a tournament that produced little evidence the continent was closing the gap on Latin America, Europe and Africa.

Both were knocked out at the quarter-final stage by two teams who did not make the final.

The Koreans especially looked a shadow of recent squads. They won only one game out of four and were hammered 6-2 by Iran in the quarter-finals.

Japan, who had won the title four years ago, had a 100 per cent record in the first three games before crumbling to a 2-0 defeat against Kuwait in a match that they controlled but failed to produce the creativity needed to win.

Team officials in both camps blamed poor preparation and long domestic seasons for the early exits. But the Japanese and Korean coaches did not hide where the Asian Cup was on their list of priorities.

Both men said immediately after defeat that they had been disappointed because the early exits would mean less preparation for the 1998 World Cup Asian qualifiers which start in March.

Saudi Arabia added to the title they won in 1984 and 1988 without capturing the imagination, and thanks to winning penalty shoot-outs in their semifinal against Iran and the final against the hosts.

In patches, they produced some of the finest

football played at the event but lacked consistency.

The home nation was one of the surprises of the championship, reaching the final after gutsy performances. What they lacked in skill and technical ability, they made up for in physical strength and fighting spirit.

Iran, who won the title

three times in a row between 1968-76 achieved some success after 20 years in the wilderness. They were the most consistent team and boasted the finest strikers.

Iran finished third after a 3-2 penalty shoot-out win over Kuwait and their forwards Ali Daei and Khodadad Azizi collected

the top scorer and best player awards respectively.

Both men have been approached by several clubs in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Iranians, who had a large contingent of well-behaved supporters, received the fair-play award.

Saudi Arabia equals Iran's Asian Cup record

ABU DHABI (R) — Saudi Arabia, who beat the United Arab Emirates in the final of the 11th Asian Cup on Saturday, equalled Iran's record of three Asian Cup titles in the 40-year history of the competition.

Year	Host	Winner	Runner Up	Result
1956	H. Kong	S. Korea	Israel	Round Robin
1960	S. Korea	S. Korea	Israel	Round Robin
1964	Israel	Israel	India	Round Robin
1968	Iran	Iran	Burma	Round Robin
1972	Thailand	Iran	S. Korea	2-1
1976	Iran	Iran	Kuwait	1-0
1980	Kuwait	Kuwait	S. Korea	3-0
1984	Singapore	S. Arabia	China	2-0
1988	Qatar	S. Arabia	S. Korea	4-3
				(Penalties)
1992	Japan	Japan	S. Arabia	1-0
1996	UAE	S. Arabia	UAE	4-2
				(Penalties)

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Sameh Madani
Managing Director

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GIVE ONE, GET TWO

Both vulnerable. West deals.

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♠ 9 7 3
♥ A K 10 8
♦ 8 5 4 2
♣ 8 5 4 2

EAST
♠ 8 5 4 2
♥ 7 6 5 4 3
♦ 7 6 5 4 3
♣ 7 6 5 4 3

SOUTH
♠ A 10
♥ 9 8 5 4 2
♦ K Q J 5
♣ K 7

The bidding:
WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♠ 1A 1A 1A
Pass 2♣ Pass 3♣ Pass
Pass 4♣ Pass 5♣ Pass

Opening lead: King of ♠

North found an interesting application of a cue-bid in an opening suit. Once South made a takeout double, North decided that the hands fitted well and would offer play for game — provided any honors in clubs South might hold could be protected from attack at the opening gun. Hence the cue-bid to force South to bid.

Then the presentations began. First, Football League Secretary David Dent handed the Orient goalkeeper a specially commissioned silver salver. Orient Chairman Barry Hearn followed with an award for Shilton's "outstanding achievement" to the game over 30 years.

Last up was a commemorative certificate from the Guinness Book of Records before Shilton jogged towards the goal he was to defend in the first half, once more acknowledging the applause.

The spade continuation was won in the closed hand, trumps were drawn in two rounds, ending on the table, and the ten of diamonds was run to West's ace. The defenders could now do no better than take the ace of clubs to complete their book. If West did anything else, declarer would come to hand. South card three of the board's clubs on the high diamonds, concede a club and ruff the remaining club. Either way, the defenders collected only one trick in each suit except for trumps.

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Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

PLAZA

* The Hunchback of Notredame

Shows: 11:00, 12:30, 3:15, 5:00, 6:30

* THE ROCK

Shows: 8:30, 10:30

CONCORD

CONCORD "1"
Sharon Stone & Isabelle Adjani...in
DIABOLIQUE

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30

CONCORD "2"

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Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

Amman Theatre & Cinema

Today presents Zawad Weld Awad theatre group in the play entitled
Five-Star Government
Starring comedians:
Mahmoud Saimeh & Hussein Tubishat
Play starts 8:30 p.m.

Nabil & Hisham's Theatre

The theatre is closed from Dec. 15, 1996 until the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan in order to prepare for a new play entitled
"Al Aman Ya Ho"

Von Gruenigen takes risks to win Alta Badia giant slalom

ALTA BADIA, Italy (AP) — Switzerland's Michael von Gruenigen, racing more aggressively than ever, clinched his first World Cup Alpine Skiing win of the season on Sunday in Alta Badia's daunting giant slalom.

The World Cup giant slalom champion, cheered on by his family at the finish, clocked an official combined time of two minutes 32.66 seconds to lead home a Swiss one-two with compatriot Steve Locher in second place.

Locher, winner of the opening giant slalom of the season in Soelden, Austria, in October, clocked 2:33.43 ahead of Italian newcomer Matteo Nana who was third in 2:34.15.

The top three after the 55-gate second leg down the Gran Risa Piste were unchanged from the leaders at the end of the 56-gate first leg, with Von Gruenigen the fastest in both.

Von Gruenigen leads the giant slalom World Cup standings with 280 points, ahead of Austrian Hans Knauss on 240.

"That was maybe one of the most aggressive races of my career," said Von Gruenigen, who had never won here before and has

now notched up eight World Cup wins.

"I think I had to take more risks today than ever," added the moustachioed Swiss, who had cast a wary eye at Locher's

Von Gruenigen on this course is about as good as a win," said the Swiss Olympic combined bronze medalist, who won his first giant slalom here in 1993.

staged a race — he has won here four times altogether — and 22-year-old Nana made sure that an Italian would again be stepping up in front of the crowd.

"To do it here in front of this crowd and on this course is like a dream," said Nana, who was 10th in Tuesday's slalom and who was second fastest in Sunday's second leg.

"With all the pressure and the fans, it's an incredible result."

ALPINE SKIING

impressively quick times in pre-race training.

"This is one of my greatest victories. It's always important to make sure of the first win but when it is here in Alta Badia it is even more important," Von Gruenigen said.

The Gran Risa Piste is perhaps the most demanding giant slalom of any on the men's circuit.

The result reversed the top two placings from Soelden when Von Gruenigen, who has had a slow start to the season after dominating last year's races, finished behind Locher.

Locher, who has drawn a blank since his opening victory, was just happy to be back on the podium again.

"To be second behind

He said that he had problems in the races in the United States with the artificial snow there.

The third place was the first ever podium finish for Nana and gave the Italian crowd something to sing about in the absence of world champion Alberto Tomba, who decided to stick to his pre-arranged training schedule rather than race.

Alta Badia was also the resort where triple Olympic gold medalist Tomba, who returned from pre-season injury with second place in a slalom at Madonna di Campiglio on Tuesday, clinched his first ever World Cup podium 10 years ago.

Since 1986, Tomba had finished on the podium in every year Alta Badia had

Al Orthodoxy beat Al Ahli to take 1996 basketball crown

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Al Orthodoxy were Saturday crowned Jordan's basketball champions by scoring a convincing 84-81 win over Al Ahli in the final match of the First Division Championship.

Al Orthodoxy defended their 1995 title depending on Fadi Al Saqqa, Nasser Bassam, Ehab Emsieh and Hilal Barakat and surprised the club's fans with the participation of long-time playmaker Jihad Saliba who arrived from the U.S. last week for the holiday season.

Al Ahli, fielding Wissam Nino, Walid Badran, Ramez Hamoudeh and Marwan Saeedi, also surprised their fans with the participation of Zeid Alkhas who came straight from the United States to help his team in the final match. Alkhas is now studying at, and playing for, Buffalo University in New York.

A solid start by both teams led the 2,000 fans cheer all through the match, especially after Al Ahli's first tie 14-14 and then 20-20.

Al Orthodoxy's Barakat, who was guarded by Al Ahli's Marwan Saeedi, had a sigh of relief after Saeedi was benched and was able to lead Al Orthodoxy with five scores and the first half with 41-36.

Al Ahli was successful in bridging the gap in the first four minutes of the second half to keep it 47-46 for Al Orthodoxy.

Al Orthodoxy's playmaker Saqqa was able to cleverly penetrate Al Ahli's defenses based on individual skills rather than a preset playing strategy or team work effort.

Saliba substituted for injured Saqqa in the second half which gave Al Ahli a chance to move forward and reduce the gap but without success.

Al Orthodoxy's no-more



Al Orthodoxy's captain Hilal Barakat holds the trophy

hesitant Muntasser Abu Taib who has not appeared in his usual form in other matches answered back with a three-pointer of his own to lead 70-60 in the 14th minute.

Al Ahli kept the pressure to reach a last-minute equaliser but Al Orthodoxy captivated fans with a last-second score to lead 84-81 and seal the match and keep the title.

Top scorers were Al Orthodoxy's Muntasser Abu Taib with 23 scores and Al

Ahli's Ramez Hamoudeh also with 23 scores.

Meanwhile, playing for the third place Al Jazireh

came in third after defeating Al Jaleel 74-55 (41-26). Al Jaleel thus finished fourth.

Final Standings

Team	W	L	Sf	Sa	Pts
Al Orthodoxy	5	1	460	404	11
Al Ahli	4	2	454	411	10
Al Jazireh	3	3	424	390	9
Al Jaleel	-	6	352	485	6



AUSTRIAN JOSEF STROBL SKIIS TO THIRD PLACE IN VAL GARDENA: Austrian Josef Strobl is airborne as he speeds in the Val Gardena World Cup downhill race December 21 to a third place. Italy's Kristian Ghedina clocked 2:00.28 to beat second placed Frenchman Luc Alphand who clocked 2:00.51 and third placed Strobl in at 2:00.65 (Reuters photo)



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U.S. studying response options if Iran behind Saudi blast — report

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. officials have begun to mull possible responses — political, economic or military — if investigations prove beyond doubt that Iran was behind the bombing of a U.S. facility in Saudi Arabia, according to a report Sunday.

Washington has a broad range of actions it could take against Tehran, however, the officials are concerned that any response, especially a military strike, could carry grave risks, the Washington Post newspaper reported.

"The potential universe (of actions) is quite wide. The real universe carries downsides," the Post quoted one unnamed senior administration official as saying.

Saudi and U.S. officials are

investigating the June 25 truck bombing of the Khobar Towers military housing complex in Dhahran that killed 19 U.S. air force personnel.

Media reports have linked the attack to Saudi extremists backed by Iran, but no formal proof has been presented publicly.

The paper reported the administration official and other sources as saying the most obvious retaliation would be to strike Iran's oil export facilities at Kharg island.

Such a raid would damage Iran's economy, but a drawback would be a hike in world oil prices.

Before taking military action, the United States

would seek U.N. sanction resolutions, and press for the allies who have been reticent to join current U.S. efforts to support tightened restrictions.

If a military option came into play, projects Tehran has given priority to such as its navy would become prime targets.

"Iran has put a lot of emphasis on building up its navy, which we could take out very quickly," a U.S. officer told the paper.

Other sources cautioned that the plans were simply part of contingency planning.

Retaliation talk "is nowhere near the real world right now," one senior official said.

"The fact that the Defence Department does contingency plans is not news."

Iran president says missile development is 'defensive'

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said on Sunday that his country has made progress in its missile development programmes but that they were for purely defensive purposes.

In a rare interview with London-based Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) television monitored here, Mr. Rafsanjani said Iranians still recall attacks on the capital Tehran by Iraqi long-range missiles during their 1980-1988 war.

He was asked about reports that Iran had made progress in testing Chinese and North Korean missiles and whether Iran intended to use them against its Arab neighbours in the oil-rich Gulf.

"I agree with you about the reports that we have made progress in the field of missile industries but this has been achieved within a purely defensive framework and we have no hostile intentions against any one," he said.

"A country like Iran can not give up the missile industry. You might remember the war, during which

(Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein was striking Tehran with long-range missiles which he had acquired from foreign countries," Mr. Rafsanjani added.

During their eight-year conflict, Iraq hit Tehran and other Iranian cities with hundreds of long-range missiles, mostly Russian-made Scuds.

But the bulk of Iraq's missile force has been destroyed by the United Nations under resolutions struck after Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"Because of those strikes, we can not prevent ourselves from benefiting from such weapons to defend ourselves. But we will not use those missiles to attack any country and I think Israel is behind such an issue," Mr. Rafsanjani said.

The United Arab Emirates, which is locked in an island dispute with Iran, has accused Tehran of deploying missiles and other weapons on the three disputed Gulf islands with the aim of attacking neighbouring countries and threatening shipping.

Iran has not denied or con-

firmed the build-up on the three strategic islands, which control the vital Hormuz Strait through which nearly one fifth of the world's oil exports pass.

Mr. Rafsanjani, whose country is at political and ideological odds with the United States, said Iran had been capable of carrying out its threats during the war with Iraq to close Hormuz to deprive the West of vital oil supplies.

"Closure of Hormuz was easy for us as our islands are located in the middle of the strait. Our position affirms our commitment to the security and stability of the region," he said.

He dismissed Gulf and Western accusations that Iran has been involved in major armament programmes.

"A comparison between what our neighbours spend on arms purchases in their defence budgets will show that we spend less than them in this field... our expenditure and revenues are known and everyone knows their size."

Demirel, party chiefs discuss scandal

ANKARA (AFP) — President Suleyman Demirel met Sunday with Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and five other party leaders to discuss allegations of mafia infiltration into the state's security apparatus.

"The president and the government should do everything necessary to unveil what is still in the dark and those responsible should be punished," conservative main opposition leader Mesut Yilmaz said Saturday.

Mr. Yilmaz and Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller as well as leaders of two left-wing parties and a small ultra-rightist party took part in the meeting at the presidential palace.

The nation has been rocked by the scandal which erupted on Nov. 3 when wanted mafia boss Abdullah Catli, a former ultra-nationalist militant, and a senior police chief were killed in a car crash in western Turkey.

Also in the same car was Sedat Bucak, a Kurdish parliamentary deputy from Mrs. Ciller's conservative True Path Party. He survived the accident but suffered serious injuries.

The incident, which exposed links among police, some politicians and organised crime, created a furor in Turkey leading to the resignation of Interior Minister Mehmet Agar and the sacking of Istanbul's security director.

According to press reports, Catli had been employed by Turkey for operations outside the country, notably against leaders of the anti-Turkish Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) in the 1980s. The ASALA claimed responsibility for assassinating nearly 40 Turkish diplomats and officials abroad in the 1970s.

Catli and three policemen, who were personal guards of Bucak, were also allegedly involved in the killing of a Kurdish tycoon who owned a chain of casinos.

Baghdad accuses U.S. of lying in espionage affair

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq on Sunday accused the United States of lying to "cover its crimes" after Baghdad claimed to have uncovered a spy ring working for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

"The American denial is aimed at covering U.S. crimes against Iraq and to mask their failure," said the ruling Baath Party newspaper Al Thawra.

"They would have to keep quiet because the annals of their agency (the CIA) are littered with crimes, sabotage and acts of terrorism," the newspaper added.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns ridiculed the reported discovery, calling it "a well-noted and tired propaganda ploy."

Official Iraqi television on Friday broadcast "confessions" by four members of what Baghdad says is network set up to spy for the CIA.

Saad Dahham Awwad, a 32-year-old civil engineer accused of being the leader of the network, said

on official television that he had been recruited by U.S. intelligence services to report on military installations in Iraq.

The accused spies said they transmitted their information to contacts in the Kurdish-controlled northern part of the country, where the United States had set up a safe-haven to protect the population from Iraqi government forces.

The newspaper Al Thawra ridiculed the U.S. reaction, recalling that Washington evacuated Iraqi Kurds and Arabs working for U.S.-funded humanitarian organisations, as well as those employed by its intelligence services after the Iraqi army's incursion into the region in August.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on Sunday urged Turkey to end the mandate for the U.S.-led air force patrolling northern Iraq.

"Mr. Aziz stressed the necessity of ending the presence of the 'hammer forces' in Turkish bases and non-interfering in Iraq's internal affairs whatever the excuses are," said the official Iraqi News Agency reporting a meeting between Mr. Aziz and a visiting delegation from a Turkish opposition party.

United States, British and French planes police a no-fly zone in northern Iraq from bases in southern Turkey to guard Iraqi Kurds against possible attacks by Iraqi armed forces.

Turkish officials said last week the task of the force would be changed and would be confined to flights over northern Iraq, Mr. Aziz then described such Turkish statements as "misleading" and asked for official explanation.

An Iraqi newspaper on Wednesday warned Ankara that bilateral ties would be damaged if Turkey renewed the mandate of the force which expires by the end of the year.

"We urge them (the Turks) to stop anything that harms Iraq or encroaches upon its sovereignty and to put an end to the illegal task of the infamous 'Provide Comfort Operations,'" Al Thawra said.

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Mubarak, Mordechai meet today at Hurghada

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel's defence minister will meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt on Tuesday to discuss the Israel-Palestinian peace process.

Yitzhak Mordechai's one-day visit is the first by an Israeli defence minister since 1989 and comes at the personal invitation of Mr. Mubarak.

"Mordechai will brief President Mubarak on the government's efforts to achieve peace and security," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Mr. Mubarak and Mr. Mordechai will meet in the Red Sea resort of Hurghada, 320 kilometres southeast of Cairo.

Digging begins on \$1.8b canal for new Nile Delta

CAIRO (AFP) — A canal project has been started to bring Nile water to the western desert to create a new delta, project chief Fayed Abdul Sayed was reported Sunday as saying.

"The digging of the canal, which will be 320 kilometres long, 30 metres wide and seven metres deep began Saturday and should be finished in 30 months," Mr. Abdul Sayed was quoted by the government newspaper Al Akhram as saying.

The project has been named "the Sheikh Zayed Canal" after United Arab Emirates President Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahyan because he is its main financial backer.

According to Mr. Abdul Sayed, the canal will cost a total of 5.5 billion Egyptian pounds (\$1.8 billion). The project's 172 digging machines, among the world's largest, are up

and running, he added.

The canal will bring Nile water to the western desert to create a new 300-square-kilometre fertile delta.

In October, Lake Nasser rose beyond 178 metres to its highest level, because of torrential rain in Ethiopia and Sudan. The water had been diverted to the Toshka Reservoir, south-west of the lake.

Water from the reservoir will be pumped into the western desert.

Launched in 1959 by Jamal Abdul Nasser and opened in 1971, the High Dam holds back the Nile waters in Lake Nasser, the world's largest artificial lake.

Built in 1981, the Toshka Canal, near Abu Simbel in the extreme south of the country, supplies a reservoir south of the Aswan Dam.

Police raid former Rao aide

CHANDIGARH (AP) — Police on Sunday raided the houses of a top politician believed to have helped former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao allegedly bribe lawmakers to keep his government afloat, officials said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is similar to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States, raided several houses of Bhajan Lal, a powerful politician who was chief minister of the northern state of Haryana until this year.

During the raids, the CBI seized unaccounted cash and jewels worth 3.5 million rupees (\$98,000) and documents listing property worth millions of rupees, federal police officials said on condition of anonymity.

The raids were conducted in several cities in Haryana and New Delhi, the officials said. Mr. Lal denied any wrongdoing.

Mr. Lal was a close associate of Mr. Rao, who also lost power in the general elections earlier this year.

Mr. Rao already is facing trial for allegedly bribing four opposition lawmakers to switch loyalty and vote for the government during a confidence vote three years ago. Mr. Rao at that time led a minority government. Mr. Rao won the vote.

The bribes allegedly were channelled through several politicians and businessmen, according to court documents.

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Weizman in trouble over remarks on gays

TEL AVIV (R) — The Israeli president's proverbial loud mouth has landed him in trouble again.

This time Ezer Weizman, a former air force chief with a rough hide and a history of verbal faux pas, has mocked homosexuals, catering to Israeli machismo but angering rights activists and left-wingers.

His aides were scrambling once more to dislodge their boss's foot from his mouth.

"The president will meet with a respectable delegation of homosexuals and lesbians on Monday and I think things will be clarified," said Mr. Weizman's office director, Arieh Shumer.

But pressed on the president's reaction to the tempest his remarks stirred, Mr. Shumer said: "He doesn't retract his statements."

Mr. Weizman, whose presidential role is largely symbolic and void of political power, sparked the ruckus in a rambling response to a question during a speech to high school students.

"Homosexuality is abnormal from a social point of view. I don't like it. What the public decides to do with (homosexuals), it will decide through laws," Mr. Weizman said, drawing applause from students.

The cheers turned to giggles as Mr. Weizman used an inflection to deride homosexuality.

"It has become 'nice' in the president said, his voice rising in tone. He repeated the word 'nice' in an even higher pitch. Rabbis lauded Mr. Weizman, who is expected to

seek reelection in 1998, but hundreds of Israelis protested outside his home on Saturday and demanded his resignation.

"It grants legitimacy to illegal attacks, to incitement, it invalidates a whole section of the public which under the law is equal in every way. The president of Israel is delegitimising this group," said legislator Yael Dayan.

Mr. Weizman, the nephew of Israel's first President Chaim Weizmann, took office in 1993 after an illustrious military career and 15 years in politics.

He helped forge the country's historic peace accord with Egypt in 1979 and served as a cabinet minister in successive Israeli governments in the 1980s — all the while notorious for his abrasive candour.

In 1994, he outraged women's groups when, commenting on one woman's quest to become an air force pilot, Mr. Weizman said a woman's place was in the home.

He has incensed politicians from left and right with pronouncements considered inappropriate for a president.

Earlier this year he compared guerrillas fighting Israeli troops in Lebanon to Nazis.

Radio news shows buzzed with talk of Mr. Weizman's latest slip, but not all the voices were negative.

"Certainly they (homosexuals) are doing things that are abnormal and abnormality should be condemned," chief rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron told Israel's army radio.

Column

Pope not to see Madonna

VATICAN CITY (AFP) — Bad news for U.S. superstar singer Madonna. Pope John Paul II is not going to see her — let alone baptise her little baby girl Lourdes Maria Leon. So said the Vatican press office, as the pop icon and star of director Alan Parker's "Evita" continued a visit to Rome to promote the film treatment of the hit Andrew Lloyd Weber musical. "We have more important things to think about," a spokesman for the Roman Catholic pontiff said.

Sources in her entourage said Madonna, 38, who gave birth in Los Angeles on Oct. 14 out of wedlock, was keen to be received by the Pope — just as Pope Pius XII met Argentina's revered Evita Peron in 1947.

Pope turns down Free Masons honour

VATICAN CITY (AFP) — Pope John Paul II refused to accept the Order of Galilee from a worldwide group long despised by the Roman Catholic Church — the Free Masons. The Masonic order in Italy had said in a statement, that it wished to honour the Pope for his "continual and meritorious work" towards international understanding and friendship. But a Vatican spokesman said.

Cirio Benedettini, said the holy see had heard nothing of the sort directly from the Free Masons, adding: "The Pope does not as a rule accept honours or prizes." Under a church law that has been in force for many years, Roman Catholics are banned from joining Masonic lodges, as the lay organisation is regarded as a secret society.

Jacqueline less rich than expected

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was far less wealthy on her death than estimated and charities are likely to get nothing from her estate, the New York Times reported. The widow of slain U.S. President John F. Kennedy left an estate worth some 100 million dollars, according to reports following her death. But the times put the figure at 43.7 million dollars based on the evaluation of executors of the former first lady. The executors said that after distribution of assets and costs, the estate will be left with a five million dollar shortfall in estate taxes to be paid by her two children — John F. Kennedy Jr. and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg. Jacky O's will had foreseen the establishment of a charitable trust providing annual charity donations for 24 years, a proposal her heirs have abandoned, the times reported.

Bogota mayor says wire pan scavengers very dangerous

BOGOTA (R) — Youngsters in Bogota have been using wire-wood-pan scavengers as makeshift fireworks causing Mayor Antanas Mockus to call for strict controls on their sales. In the days before Christmas, children have found a way around the capital's year-old ban on fireworks by waving around the flammable, wire pan cleaners like sparklers or swirling them on a piece of string like pinwheels. "These pan scavengers are as dangerous as the most dangerous fireworks. Children should not play with these things like this. I will see if we can find a way to control the sale of these scavengers," Mockus told the NTC TV news programme.

Somali factions prepare for battle for Mogadishu

MOGADISHU (AFP) — Somali factions have posted armed militiamen and heavy weapons on the green line dividing Mogadishu in preparation for a possible battle for control of the Somali capital, witnesses said Sunday.

The preparations are concentrated in the Medina residential district of south Mogadishu where warring factions have posted clan warriors on the green line dividing northern and southern parts of the war-torn city.

Witnesses said warlord Hussein Mohammad Aided, whose United Somali Congress (USC/SNA) faction controls most of south Mogadishu, had deployed heavy artillery guns along the entire green line and near Mogadishu airport.

Other opposing militia, notably those of the USC/SNA faction led by Osman Hassan Ali Ato and Ali Mahdi Mohammad's Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA), commanded by Muse

Sudi Yalahow, are also in position in the same areas ready for action against Aided forces.

"General Mohammad Farah Aided was killed in Medina, and his son Hussein Aided will be killed in the same spot if he does not stop fighting," warned Mr. Yalahow in reference to Aided, who was fatally wounded on August 1, while leading USC/SNA forces in an effort to capture Medina. The tensions come after at least six people were killed

and 17 others wounded when three rounds of mortar shells landed Tuesday in south Mogadishu.

The deaths brought to more than 100 the number of people killed in four days of heavy fighting between militiamen of Somali clan warlords, according to hospital and militia sources.

The U.N. Security Council has called for an immediate end to factional fighting in Somalia.



TENSION IN HEBRON: A crowd of Jewish settlers shout at a Palestinian woman as an Israeli soldier among the crowd keeps tempers from exploding on Sunday after a petrol bomb was thrown at the Beit Hadassah settler enclave in the centre of the West Bank town of Hebron (Reuters photo)

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